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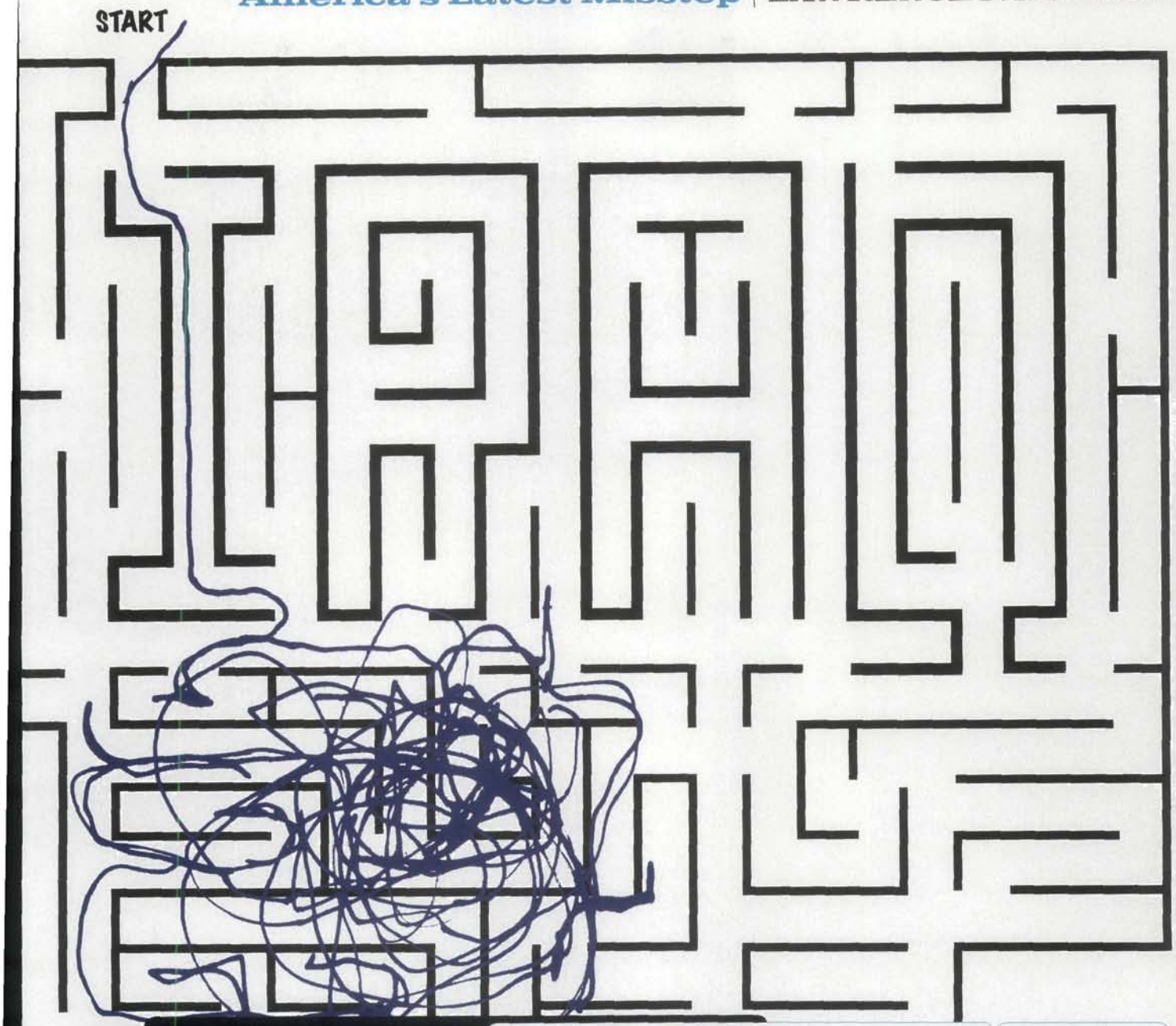

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FEBRUARY 19 & 26, 2007 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,805 VOLUME 236

Cover Story

Lawrence F. Kaplan **16** **The Wrong Surge** The United States has finally found an effective strategy for fighting the war in Iraq. Too bad we're applying it in the wrong place.

Politics & the World

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Mormon angst, &c.

Peter Beinart **6** **TRB** | **Biden Time** The gaffe-prone windbag America needs.

The Editors **7** **Killing Fields**
There are plenty of steps that could help save Darfur. Why aren't we bothering to try them?

Michelle Cottle **8** **Doledrums**
From superstar presidential candidate to Republican scapegoat.

Jason Zengerle **9** **Home Boy** For years, presidential candidates came to Iowa to kiss Tom Vilsack's ring. Now the kingmaker wants to be king.

Jacques Rupnik **12** **Popular Front** Eastern Europe goes from red to brown.

Ezekiel J. Emanuel and Victor R. Fuchs **14** **Vouchsafe**
A new plan for universal health care.

David Hajdu **34** **NEW YORK DIARIST** | **A Mighty Wind**

Books & the Arts

Stanley Kauffmann **20** **FILMS** | **Being Watched** *The Decomposition of the Soul* and *The Lives of Others* investigate the investigators.

Sarah Williams Goldhagen **21** **ARCHITECTURE** | **Project Runway** Fashion and architecture share certain ideas and methods, and they may even draw inspiration from similar sources. But they are not exactly "parallel practices," as a new exhibition claims.

Ruth Franklin **26** **The Prisoner of Sex** *The Castle in the Forest* by Norman Mailer

William Deresiewicz **29** **Unhappy Endings** *Thomas Hardy* by Claire Tomalin

Jennifer Chang **32** **POEM** | *This Corner of the Western World*

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY *James Victore*

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CORRESPONDENCE

STORMIN' MORMON

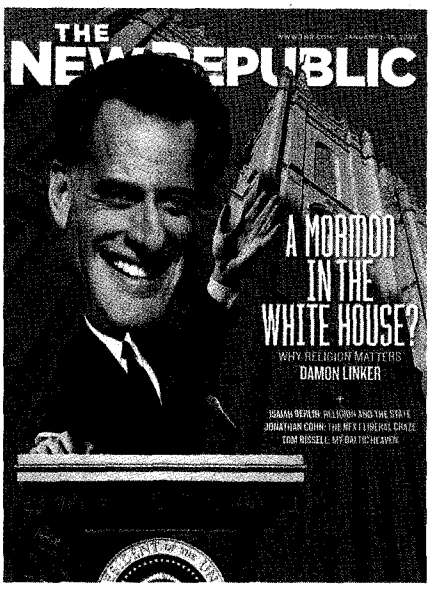
DAMON LINKER'S ARTICLE ABOUT Mitt Romney and Mormonism was unworthy of THE NEW REPUBLIC's standards of journalism and ethics ("The Big Test," January 1–15). If Romney's religion is such a concern, why didn't Linker fret about its impact on Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader? Reid is an active and believing Mormon, but Linker failed even to mention his name or explain why far more than half of Senate Democrats voted to make him their leader. Religion is only dangerous in the hands of conservative Republicans, it seems. Linker is also dead wrong on Mormon doctrine. He claims that Mormons worship a finite God, which is patently untrue. *The Book of Mormon* describes God as "infinite and eternal" in numerous passages. Linker claims that Mormons believe God is arbitrary and not subject to any permanent or higher moral law. Yet, again, *The Book of Mormon* plainly teaches that God's nature is unchanging and the perfect embodiment of every moral virtue. Indeed, it teaches that, if God were to cease to be just, he would "cease to be God." Mormons can appeal to a higher moral law as much as adherents of any other faith. Finally, Linker portrays the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an all-powerful prophet with almost despotic powers and no checks against the abuse of his authority. This is a gross exaggeration. All major decisions taken by the president of the Church must be ratified unanimously by his two counselors and by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles—in other words, by 14 very practical and experienced men from different backgrounds and political persuasions. There are more checks and balances in this denomination than in most. But why let facts get in the way when Mormonism is the issue?

PAMELA HAMBLIN
Albuquerque, New Mexico

LINKER ASSERTS THAT "Mormonism lacks the intellectual or spiritual resources to challenge a declaration of the prophet who runs the Church, regardless of how theologically or morally outrageous that declaration might be." Addressing the issue of Church members who might say they would follow their Church leaders even if they knew them to be wrong, Mormon Apostle Charles W. Penrose said, "[S]uch obedience as this is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme; and the man who would thus willingly degrade himself should not claim a rank among intelligent beings." Linker says LDS doctrine would have us believe that "[e]verything we know—or could ever know—about right and wrong comes entirely from divine commands communicated to humanity by prophets." Hardly. University of Richmond Professor Terryl Givens, author of *By The Hand of Mormon*, notes the fundamental LDS doctrine that "revelation is the province of everyman" and that "concepts like revelation, prayer, inspiration" are available to all. Indeed, Givens explains, "The 'knowability' of all truth, the openness of mystery, the reality of personal revelation find vivid illustration within [*The Book of Mormon*] and invite reenactment outside it." Linker's essay needs a little additional research.

MAURICE MCBRIDE
Fredericksburg, Virginia

DAMON LINKER RESPONDS:
Crafting an adequate response to Pamela Hamblin's letter would require engaging in a fairly elaborate bit of Mormon prooftexting. Out of consideration for TNR's non-LDS readers, I'll limit myself to suggesting that Hamblin reread Joseph Smith's "King Follett Discourse" and the entry on "Natural Law" in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* for some evidence that Mormon theology is just a bit more unorthodox than she seems to believe. As for Hamblin's contention that, in my view, "[r]eligion is only dangerous in the hands of conservative Republicans," I unapologetically plead guilty, at least if we limit ourselves to the present moment in U.S. political history. It is, after all, the religious right that has injected piety into the nation's politics in recent years. Having done so, it now wishes to declare the religious views of candidates off-limits for public debate, discussion, and scrutiny. Sorry, but the right can't have it both ways. If believers want to keep their religious convictions private, I wholeheartedly encourage them to follow the lead of such Democrats as John F. Kennedy and Harry Reid in doing so. If, instead, they insist on bringing their faith with them into the public square, then they would be well-advised to drop their defensiveness and get used to reading articles like mine.



Maurice McBride would have us believe that non-Mormons need not worry about the LDS prophet who acts as "the mouthpiece of God on Earth" because every Mormon is his own prophet, receiving his own equally authoritative revelation directly from God. Suffice it to say that this does nothing to allay my concerns about the prospect of the United States electing a Mormon president. ■

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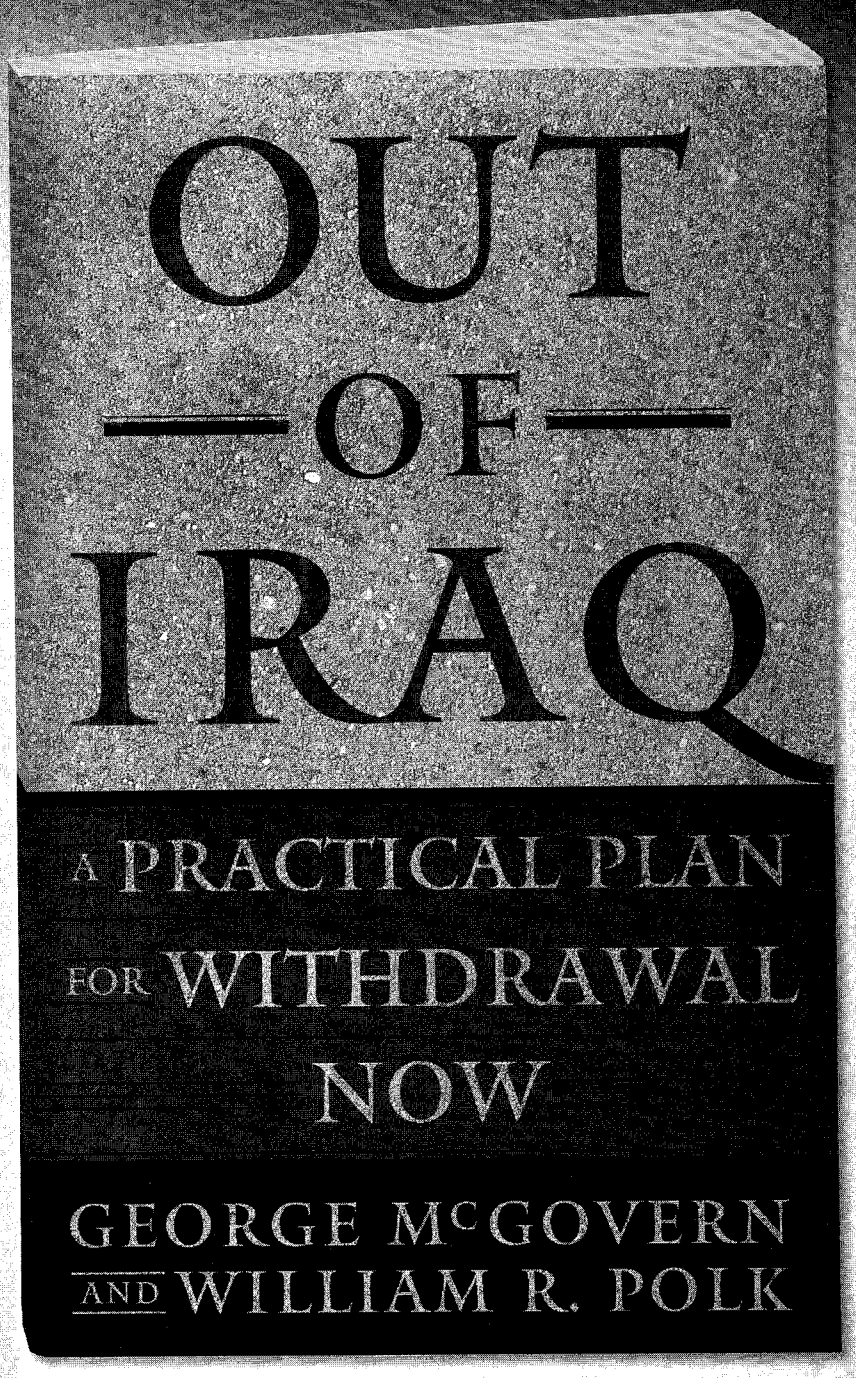

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Biden Time

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

JOE BIDEN IS THE REASON BARACK Obama was smart to run for president. He's a textbook example of why lengthy service in the U.S. Senate makes it harder to win the White House. Once upon a time, Biden—elected to the Senate at age 29—was a political up-and-comer. He was brainy but blue-collar: a Catholic from a state that is more culturally conservative than it seems. And he was eloquent. People forget, but Biden is one of the best speechmakers in the Democratic Party. When he ran for president in 1988, passion was his forte. Sure, he was undisciplined, but so was Bill Clinton. Two decades ago, his national political future looked bright.

Today, he's in danger of becoming a laughingstock. He's become a windbag—indulged for too long in an institution where no one ever makes you stop talking. And the consequences were on disastrous display last week, when he began riffing on his presidential rivals to the *New York Observer* and ended up suggesting that, before Obama came along, black presidential candidates were not merely inarticulate but also unclean.

Now half the punditocracy is demanding his head, and the other half is watching the bloodsport with unseemly glee. My colleague and friend Jonathan Chait, in perhaps the oddest column of the entire saga, said Biden would be a "terrific" president and that his Obama quote was "widely misunderstood," but that he should drop out of the presidential race nonetheless, because he's gaffe-prone and thus can't win. This strikes me as a strange conflation of the descriptive and the normative. If Biden wants to waste his time in a quixotic bid for the presidency—a job Chait thinks he'd do extremely well—why stop him?

I have my own reasons for hoping Biden stays in the race. Partly, it's the broader principle: Stupid, insensitive remarks shouldn't sink political candidacies unless they bespeak some larger animus. George Allen's "macaca" comment mattered because, as Ryan Lizza has documented ("Pinprick," May 8, 2006), Allen had a long history of racist sympathies. So did Trent Lott, long before he endorsed Strom Thurmond for president. Biden, by contrast, has another dumb remark on his record (this one about Indian Americans), but his long career in Congress suggests no sympathy for racists. Given that, he doesn't deserve the political death sentence. Journalists shouldn't be hypocrites: You can't ask politicians to be unscripted and then decapitate them any time they misspeak.

There's another reason I hope Biden stays in the race: the effect he'll have on his competitors. Biden's record on Iraq isn't perfect. But he knows more about the issue than anyone else in the field and, as a result, will be a valuable bullshit detector. Consider something else Biden said in his now-infamous *Observer* interview. He mocked Hillary Clinton's recent suggestion that the United States threaten to withdraw funding from Iraqi troops in order to "send a clear message—that we are finished with their empty promises and with this president's blank check." Biden was incredulous, and he was right to be incredulous. Almost all of his competitors are saying this kind of thing. John Edwards, for instance, recently told Tim Russert that the United States should begin to withdraw its troops because only then will the Iraqis feel "imminent responsibility" to "reach any kind of reconciliation." It's a politically convenient claim. Democrats want to quickly withdraw U.S. troops, but they don't want to admit that if the United States leaves, things will get worse. So they say things will actually get *better*, because once Iraq's leaders realize that we won't save them from themselves, they'll finally get serious about overcoming their sectarian divisions. This argument allows Democrats to paint withdrawal not as an admission of defeat, but as a strategy for victory.

But it's wildly unconvincing. After all, you can't threaten people with an outcome they already want. Last November, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki explicitly called for U.S. troops to leave Baghdad, before being strong-armed by the Bush administration into accepting a troop surge. He doesn't fear a U.S. pullout; he welcomes it, because, with U.S. troops out of the way, his Shia allies can more easily cleanse Baghdad of Sunnis. Edwards and Clinton seem to think that, if the United States begins to withdraw its troops or money, Iraqis will peer over the abyss and pull back. But Iraqis don't need help visualizing the abyss; they're living it. The problem is that those Iraqi leaders genuinely interested in sharing power across sectarian lines are mostly sidelined, exiled, or dead. The ones who remain are less interested in averting a civil war than in winning one.

That's not to say Clinton and Edwards are wrong about the policy. The United States *should* begin to withdraw its troops, not so we can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat but because we've already been defeated—because U.S. troops cannot defeat an insurgency that has mass Sunni support and militias that have mass Shia support in a country where a majority of people want our soldiers out—or dead.

Biden just wants his opponents to be honest about what they're proposing. Because, if they are, they will have to begin a highly unpleasant and urgently needed debate about how to handle the awful consequences of a necessary withdrawal. No one really knows how an all-out Iraqi civil war will affect the Middle East, but, as the Brookings Institution's Kenneth Pollack and Daniel Byman recently argued, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait, and even Iran could be destabilized by waves of refugees, weapons, and jihadists. Keeping those countries from buckling may require aggressive diplomatic, financial, and even military intervention (not to mention a generous refugee policy for the Iraqis whose country we have helped destroy). It's little wonder that top-tier Democratic candidates avoid discussing this for fear of being labeled defeatist. But, if they do, they'll be allowing George W. Bush to do further damage. Four years ago, the Bush administration didn't plan for how to keep the peace in post-Saddam Iraq. Now Democrats must begin a debate about how to keep the peace in the entire Middle East.

If Biden can force his presidential opponents into that discussion, he'll be doing the country a service. It's not the role he probably imagined for himself. But it's crucial and honorable. And it's why he should stay in the race.

PETER BEINART

Peter Beinart is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

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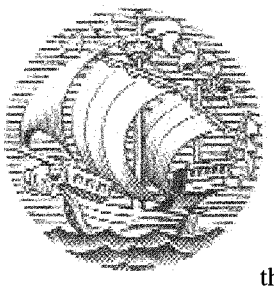
Killing Fields

On November 11, two men in green uniforms arrived at the home of Abakar Yussuf, then ordered his wife outside. "When she came out, they shot her in the back and she fell to the ground and died," Yussuf told Amnesty International. "They then took her by her feet and pulled her back into the house and set fire to it. ... When I returned to find my wife's body, all that was left were her bones." Four days later, in the same Chadian village, attackers threw Abdoulaye Khamis's 80-year-old brother into a hut they had set on fire. "I ran back ... and tried to save my brother," Khamis explained. "I pulled his body out of the burning hut, but I was too late." Hundreds throughout eastern Chad were killed in similar attacks during the second half of last year—a year that saw the Darfur genocide continue apace in both Sudan and neighboring states.

Two weeks ago, when President Bush promised in his State of the Union address to "awaken the conscience of the world to save the people of Darfur," Congress applauded. We cringed. Bush has been promising for years to save Darfur. So has the United Nations. So has Europe. Yet Darfur has not been saved. In Western capitals, the moral high ground belongs to politicians who mouth the correct sentiments about Darfur. But, in the interior of northern Africa, the foreseeable future belongs to roving sadists who—in the name of Arab supremacy and at the behest of Sudan's genocidal government—shoot wives and toss elderly men into burning huts.

By now, these sadists and their powerful patrons must have figured out the obvious: that no one is going to stop them. Nearly six months have passed since the United Nations authorized the deployment of peacekeepers to end the genocide. But Khartoum continues to wrangle and bluster over the terms of that deployment, and it still seems unlikely that a U.N. force large enough to stop the killing will ever arrive in western Sudan. Meanwhile, many, including the U.N.'s new secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon, hold out hope for a negotiated settlement between Darfur's rebel groups and Khartoum. But, so far, the rebel factions haven't even been able to unite, let alone bargain effectively with the government. And, besides, Khartoum—which wants to prolong the genocide it designed and orchestrated—is hardly in a rush to cement a genuine peace accord.

Precisely because neither of these two options ever seemed likely to work, we have argued over the past year that NATO intervention is the best way to end the genocide. We still favor that approach, but we have no illusions that the Bush administration will ever undertake it. Last week, speaking at a panel in Washington, D.C., John Prendergast of the International Crisis Group urged Western governments at least to weigh the possibility of military action against Sudan—but then conceded, "It's a laughable concept as we sit here today." True enough. At this point, we would be happy to see the West take *any* action that has even the remotest chance of stopping the genocide. Some efforts, such as a no-fly zone over Darfur or a naval blockade of Port Sudan, could, at least in theory, be undertaken unilaterally or by a small group of countries. Other proposals, such as travel bans that target government leaders or sanctions against Sudanese oil, would require broad consent from the international community to be effective.



Unfortunately, none of these measures seem likely to happen any time soon. For one thing, when it comes to Darfur, we have shown time and again that we simply lack the will for substantial steps of any kind. For another, China—a major consumer of Sudanese oil and a longtime supplier of equipment to Khartoum's military—would almost certainly foil efforts to punish Sudan economically.

And so the West either isn't going to act or isn't going to act strongly enough, and the plight of Darfuris will become more dire by the day. Indeed, as recent reports of attacks on aid workers piled up, one humanitarian group, Médecins du Monde, decided to pull out of Darfur. If others follow, millions of displaced persons could soon be without water, food, or medicine.

We wish we could identify some hopeful sign for Darfur on the horizon. But we are not naïve: The world has managed to live with the consequences of its inaction for three years now; surely it can do so for many more. Meanwhile, the confidence of those who terrorize and kill will only grow. Recently, NBC News interviewed a 17-year-old girl who was attacked in October 2006. "You are black," a man in a Sudanese uniform had taunted just before raping her. "You have no place here." Then he offered a prediction: "We will push you out of here. This land will remain for us." And you know what? He's probably right. ■

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Liddy's fall from grace.

Doledrums

BY MICHELLE COTTLE

ELIZABETH DOLE LOOKS small and tidy tucked into a corner of the Cupa Cupa coffee shop, situated on the ground floor of the Watergate complex where she lives with husband Bob Dole. (Yes, even she calls him by both names.) The North Carolina senator is, as always, perfectly coiffed and perfectly outfitted in a smart black pantsuit with a white collarless blouse and just the right amount of gold jewelry sprinkled about. Before I even settle into my seat, Dole asks if I'd like anything to drink and offers up a bottle of spring water already on the table. Her perfectly polished nails are wrapped around a steaming coffee, and, in her trademark honeyed drawl, she jokes about needing a hand-warmer to defend against the falling snow. The senator scrunches up her shoulders, gives a mock shiver, and flashes a perfect smile. But, above the smile, her blue-green eyes seem a little tired, and all I can think is, "How much must it suck to be Liddy Dole these days?"

Failure is hard on anyone. But it must be particularly tough for a political celebrity like Dole, with her Miss Perfect persona, to bounce back after the electoral catastrophe she suffered as head of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) last year. In a cycle when the entire GOP came unraveled, Dole was singled out by fellow Republicans, who criticized—well, pretty much every aspect of her performance, from recruiting to strategy to, most notably, fund-raising. As early as August 2005, conservative columnist Robert Novak was declaring that Dole's recruitment efforts had "mostly failed." The following summer, Senator Trent Lott expressed similar anxieties ("I'm concerned about how some things have gone," he told the *Chicago Tribune*), while other Republican lawmakers and strategists publicly chewed their nails over the growing money gap. As Election Day drew nigh, both Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Republican National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlman reportedly had lost so much confidence in Dole that they were intervening in races independently. Post-election, ousted Montana Senator Conrad Burns flamed the NRSC for botching its ad strategy in the state. Even now, some conservatives remain bitter about Dole's support of then–Rhode Island Senator Lincoln Chafee's primary fight against right-winger Steve Laffey. "They spent a tremendous amount—well over a million—attacking Laffey in the primary, just to watch it go up in smoke in the general," huffs Club For Growth President Pat Toomey, whose group championed Laffey. And, even as he praises Dole and her team for doing "a lot of things right," new NRSC chairman John Ensign notes that, "in a hard-money world," Chuck Schumer and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) "grossly outraised the Republican Committee," an outcome he declares "unacceptable."

In retrospect, Dole was perhaps not the best pick for chairwoman. Sure, she's a big-name Republican, which is why she was chosen over Senator Norm Coleman. But she lacks a reputation for being either a ruthless money-grubber or a political animal, and so it's unsurprising that, in addition to letting the DSCC outraise her by $30 million, Dole was ill-suited to the partisan mudwrestling aspects of the job (especially compared with Democratic counterpart Schumer). Her election oversight, meanwhile, was bashed for being too passive (e.g., failing to drive whackjob Katherine Harris from the Florida race), too aggressive (e.g., bulldozing the Washington state primary field for party favorite Mike McGavick), and even both (depending on which side of the Chafee-Laffey divide you stood). No matter that she was operating in one of the most Republican-unfriendly climates in memory. And no matter that most folks now agree the tight races in places like Virginia and Missouri weren't lost on money. When elections go south, the leadership is a thankless place to be, and the stench of failure now clings to Dole like poop on a shoe.

Adding injury to insult, in mid-December the senator underwent surgery to replace a bum hip that had been causing pain in her knees and putting a hitch in her gait. "Thirty-nine minutes for the surgery," she explains. "But a *heck* of a lot longer for rehabilitation." In addition to enduring physical therapy, Dole must temporarily keep her knees below a certain level, tote around a cushion to sit on, and take care not to "outpace" herself when walking.

And then there's the Hillary thing. Dole has nothing against her New York colleague per se. They work together on legislation and meet now and again at girls-only gatherings organized by Senator Barbara Mikulski. And, yet, it was only two presidential cycles ago that Dole was the hot-shot woman making headlines with her historic presidential campaign. Now, amid all the buzz about the looming possibility of a President Hillary, Dole's own run has been all but forgotten—except when it's implicitly derided by talk of Clinton's status as the first *real* female contender. Though gracious about her past Oval Office ambitions, Dole clearly remains a little sensitive about having flamed out so early (*if only* she hadn't stuck around reorganizing the Red Cross until January of 1999—a decision she feels compelled to explain to me at some length) and about the perception that she was not a serious candidate. "I came in third in the Iowa straw poll," she recalls, adding helpfully, "That's a significant event, the Iowa straw poll."

But Dole's moment has passed. Seven years ago, she was vying for her party's presidential nomination. Today, she finds herself perched gingerly atop an orthopedic cushion in a near-empty coffee shop, talking about what might have been and trying to move beyond the sting of having helped lead her party into a brutal electoral thrashing. At 70, Dole

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may well have ridden her celebrity through to the other side, to join her hubby in some post-stardom emeritus position of respectability mixed with irrelevance. The situation has gotten so grim that the North Carolina press has been floating rumors that Dole might not have it in her to run for Senate again next year.

Dole isn't one for wallowing, though, and—with a reelection campaign looming—she is clearly eager to make everyone forget all about the "horrific," "horrendous" experience of 2006 by throwing herself into as many projects as possible. Topping the agenda is her crusade against hunger, which prompted Dole to join colleagues Blanche Lincoln, Gordon Smith, and Dick Durbin in forming a "hunger caucus." Then there are the economic development programs she's pursuing to help her state weather the ongoing exodus of the textile and furniture industries; her efforts on behalf of military families and veterans; her Banking Committee work to establish a "strong, world-class" regulator for government-sponsored enterprises like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; and, of course, her long-running campaign to win federal recognition for the Lumbee Indian tribe. Of course, with Iraq and deficit-cutting in the spotlight, it remains unclear whether Dole can get anyone to pay attention to any of these pet projects—especially now that she has been knocked into the minority. But the senator declares herself unconcerned. "A lot of this is about relationships," she assures me, noting that she goes "way back" with many of her Democratic colleagues.

Asked whether her NRSC stint put a strain on these cross-party ties, Dole demurs, "They expect it. They know you're going to have to get out there and do what you're supposed to do as chairman of the senatorial committee. Patty Murray's had to do it. A lot of people have had to do it." Here, perhaps fearing that she's sounding a tad thankless, Dole quickly clarifies—"And it's a privilege to be able to support the team and be a member of the leadership"—but in a sing-song voice that sounds like she's reciting boilerplate that even she doesn't believe. And, then, off she goes again, barreling toward the promise of a better tomorrow with talk of all the great programs she really wants to launch and all the problems she really wants to solve. Never has a lawmaker seemed so relieved to abandon the burdens of party politics.

Indeed, falling flat at the NRSC may be the best thing to happen to Dole since she wed herself a hotshot senator three decades ago. While she occasionally takes a stab at political glamour roles, at heart Liddy seems more bureaucrat than politician. (This is, after all, the gal who spent two years as Richard Nixon's deputy assistant for Consumer Affairs, six years at the Federal Trade Commission, four-and-a-half years as Ronald Reagan's Transportation secretary, two years as Poppy Bush's Labor secretary, and eight years as head of the Red Cross.) It's not that she isn't a pleasant presence on the stump (though perhaps a bit scripted) or that she dislikes fund-raising any more than your average lawmaker. But the widespread sense of Dole is that she possesses neither the love of the game (think Bill Clinton) nor the killer instinct (think Hillary) so often associated with top-tier political players. The glad-handing and the fund-raising, the media appearances and the partisan sparring are all well and good. But give Dole a chance to discuss overhauling the way community colleges transfer course credits between institutions, and she can go on all day—and maybe she will, now that she's gotten this campaign-chief business out of her system. And, let's face it, she's unlikely to be asked to do anything like it ever again. ■

Tom Vilsack's long road.

Home Boy

BY JASON ZENGERLE

SOMEWHERE ALONG U.S. ROUTE 20, IOWA

"I THINK I'M making political history," Tom Vilsack tells me. It's a frigid January night, and we're in an SUV barreling down a lonely stretch of highway amid the fallow cornfields of eastern Iowa. With the speedometer nudging 70 miles per hour, we're headed to the tiny city of Independence, where a restaurant is hosting an event for Vilsack's presidential campaign. In a Democratic primary field packed to the gills with candidates whose election would represent a monumental political first—Hillary Clinton would be the first woman elected president, Barack Obama the first African American, Bill Richardson the first Latino, Dennis Kucinich the first elf—it's tough for a middle-aged white guy like Vilsack to earn a place for himself in the political history books. But, on this night, he believes he's found one: He's making political history by eschewing a chauffeur. With one hand on the steering wheel and the other gripping a drive-thru cheeseburger, he jokingly boasts, "I think I'm the first presidential candidate to ever drive himself to a campaign event."

Vilsack can pull off this historic feat because he's in Iowa, where he has lived for the last 32 years, eight of which he just spent as governor. In other words, he knows the state's political landscape—to say nothing of its roads—better than any other candidate in the 2008 presidential race. Which is the main reason why Vilsack is running for president in the first place. Although he was a popular two-term governor of a state that, until he took office, hadn't elected a Democrat in more than 30 years; although he served as the chairman of politically important national groups like the Democratic Governors Association and the Democratic Leadership Council; although he came within a hair's breadth of being tapped as John Kerry's running mate in 2004—in spite of all these credentials, Vilsack's presidential campaign would be inconceivable were he not from the

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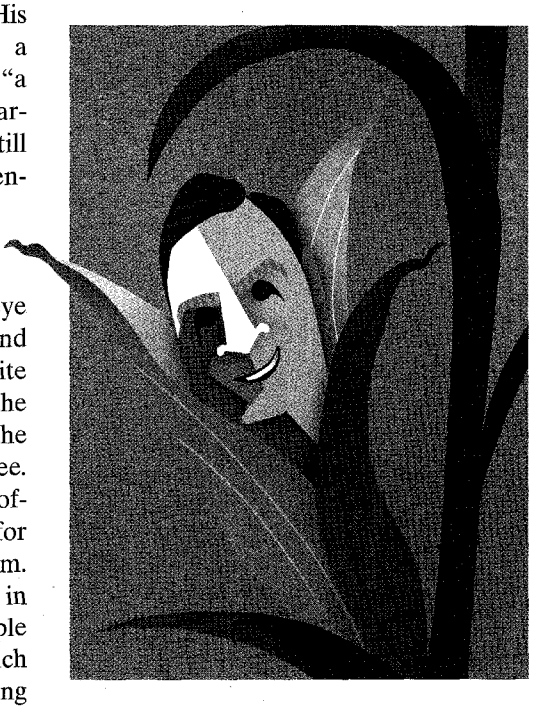
state that holds the nation's first presidential caucus.

But, despite this home-field advantage and the fact that he was the first Democratic candidate to officially declare, Vilsack has had a hard time getting much traction. He's currently just a blip—if that—in the national polls, and he's struggling to raise campaign funds, having scraped together little more than $1 million of the $20 million it's assumed any real contender will need to compete. Clinton, Obama, and John Edwards, he concedes, "can go out and in one night raise what it may take me a month to raise." Vilsack's challenge even extends to the physical: With sloping shoulders and a flat, stolid speaking style, he resembles a put-upon high school principal rather than an ambitious politician. Even his supporters seem to concede he's lacking a bit in the charisma department: His wife calls him a "workhorse"; a close friend describes him as "a plodder." On this night, he's wearing a splashy purple tie, but he still manages to come across as essentially colorless.



And yet, to hear Vilsack tell it, all of these shortcomings are easily surmountable. With one eye on the road to Independence and the other on the road to the White House, he confidently spells out the scenario in which he becomes the Democratic presidential nominee. "I win in Iowa," he says matter-of-factly as his car speeds by a sign for the National Farm Toy Museum. "Then I do better than expected in New Hampshire. And then people begin to ask the question: Which of the two or three remaining candidates has the best chance of winning the states in the Midwest, the Southeast, the Mountain West? And I think there's no question I would have the best chance." Once he wins in Iowa, Vilsack says, the press will stop treating the Democratic primaries as a three-horse race between Clinton, Edwards, and Obama. Once he wins in Iowa, he says, the fund-raising will pick up and "the Internet does kick in." Once he wins in Iowa, "it's a whole different ballgame."

But, first, Vilsack actually has to win in Iowa. As we speed toward Independence, where Vilsack will make the case to his fellow Iowans about why he should be president, it begins to snow. Initially, it's just a flurry, but soon the snow begins to pick up, and before long it's whipping across the road and blocking out the horizon. When we started the trip, Vilsack explained that he wanted to get behind the wheel—rather than his campaign aide, who was relegated to the back seat—because the state troopers who served as his chauffeurs had never let him drive while he was governor. (He'd just left office earlier that month.) "My driving record's been quite good for the last eight years," he quipped. At the time, under clear skies, this didn't seem like such a big deal. But now, with the snow coming down in curtains and visibility reduced to about ten feet, it occurs to me that it might be nice to have someone with fresher driving experience in command of the vehicle. It seems like the same thought might be occurring to Vilsack, too. No longer paying as much attention to my questions—or his cheeseburger—he has both hands on the wheel and is leaning forward in his seat, trying to see out the windshield. "Boy, this is tough," he mutters, as the speedometer drops to about 40 miles per hour.

Navigating Iowa's presidential politics, it turns out, has proved similarly difficult for Vilsack. Despite the fact that he's counting on his favorite-son status to carry him to victory in the caucus and give his campaign a much-needed boost of momentum, his presidential candidacy hasn't been faring much better in his home state than it has in the rest of the country. He's been mired in a distant third or fourth place in numerous polls of likely Iowa caucus-goers—the most recent of which had him at 12 percent, 23 points behind the first-place Clinton. Meanwhile, a *Des Moines Register* survey last month found that only 40 percent of Iowans thought it was a good idea for Vilsack to run for president, with 47 percent deeming it a bad idea. And that's bad news for Vilsack, because, as even he concedes, anything less than a first-place finish in Iowa will instantly transform his longshot presidential bid into a no-shot one. Which means that, before Vilsack tries to convince the rest of the country that he's presidential material, he's going to have to do a better job of convincing the people in his own backyard.

UNLIKE MOST SUCCESSFUL Iowa politicians, the 56-year-old Vilsack isn't originally from the Hawkeye State, but he has a personal story compelling enough to make up for that shortcoming in the minds of Iowa voters. He was born in Pittsburgh, where, a few days after his birth, he was placed in a Catholic orphanage. His adoptive family was financially and emotionally troubled: His father ran a struggling storefront real-estate business and his mother battled alcohol and prescription-drug addiction; he recalls that when his mother was drunk she'd sometimes beat him with a metal belt-buckle. He eventually escaped Pittsburgh to attend Hamilton College in New York, where he met his future wife, Christie. After graduating from Albany Law School, he moved to Christie's hometown of Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where he joined her father's law practice. "I wasn't born in Iowa," Vilsack likes

DAVID COWLES

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to say, "but I got here as quickly as I could."

Vilsack might have stayed a small-town lawyer were it not for a strange and tragic event. In 1986, a deranged farmer angry about zoning issues shot and killed Mount Pleasant's mayor during a city council meeting. The slain mayor's father urged Vilsack to run to carry on his son's work. After five years tending to the civic affairs of Mount Pleasant, he was elected to the state Senate. In 1998, he ran for governor. He scored a narrow upset victory in the Democratic primary over a former state Supreme Court justice, and then he squared off against former Republican Representative Jim Lightfoot in the general election. Although he began the race trailing by 20 points in the polls, he slowly chipped away at Lightfoot's lead and ultimately won by a comfortable five-point margin. *The Almanac of American Politics* deemed Vilsack "probably the biggest upset winner of the year."

As governor, Vilsack was hamstrung by declining state revenues and a hostile legislature (there were Republican majorities in both houses for six of his eight years in office). Nonetheless, he managed some impressive achievements. He expanded preschool access, reduced class sizes, and increased health care coverage for children and the poor. He created a $500 million fund to lure businesses to Iowa and a $250 million fund for community development projects—both of which helped reverse the state's "brain drain." And he altered Iowa's partisan balance—with Democrats now controlling the state's governorship, House, and Senate for the first time in 42 years. "He took a purple state and made it into a solid blue state," says former Iowa Democratic chairman Gordon Fischer. When Vilsack left office in January, a *Register* poll found that 69 percent of Iowans approved of the job he did as governor.

Of course, there are plenty of popular and successful two-term Democratic governors, including Kansas's Kathleen Sebelius, Arizona's Janet Napolitano, Tennessee's Phil Bredesen, and North Carolina's Mike Easley—and, other than New Mexico's Bill Richardson, you don't see any of them running for president this year. Then again, these governors didn't have presidential candidates constantly kissing up to them for the last eight years. From the moment Vilsack took office, he was romanced by practically any Democrat even thinking about the White House, and, while he officially stayed neutral in both the 2000 and 2004 Iowa caucuses, he wielded a significant amount of power behind the scenes. When Christie Vilsack endorsed John Kerry nine days before the 2004 caucus, many viewed it as a tacit endorsement of Kerry by her husband—and some Iowa political observers point to it as the moment when Kerry's victory in the caucus became assured. Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that the kingmaker would start thinking that he himself should be king. As Vilsack says, "Having watched all these folks come through the state in the eight years I was governor, I realized that I could do what they were doing."

For Vilsack, running for president means trying to translate his achievements in Iowa into a national platform. With its abundance of corn and soybeans, Vilsack as governor pushed Iowa to increase its production of ethanol and soy diesel; he also focused on wind energy—ultimately making Iowa a leader in alternative and renewable fuels. And so, as a presidential candidate, Vilsack is making "energy security" his number-one issue, framing it as a silver bullet that addresses any number of concerns, from global warming to the economy to, most importantly in the current political environment, America's reliance on oil from, as Vilsack calls them, "countries that wish to do us harm."

Along those lines, Vilsack has staked out the most aggressive antiwar position among the Democratic contenders, calling on Congress to use its spending power to bring an immediate end to the war in Iraq. "Those in Congress who voted for the war, those in Congress who have voted to continue the war, and those in Congress who have funded the war can surely vote to end the war," he said in a speech at the Democratic National Committee's winter meetings last weekend. "Congress has the constitutional responsibility and a moral duty to cut off funding for the status quo. Not a cap—an end. Not eventually—immediately." And if a cynic suggests that Vilsack has a certain freedom to make this demand of Congress—since he himself doesn't actually have to vote on the issue—he gets a bit testy. "I called every family who lost a loved one in the state while I was governor," he says. "So don't tell me I've got a free ride on this."

THE CHALLENGE FOR Vilsack now is getting his fellow Iowans to buy the idea that his experience as their governor has prepared him to be their president. As he drives through the snow in his SUV (which, given his focus on energy security, is a hybrid), he concedes that it's an uphill battle. "People perceive me as a governor," he says. "They have to make the transition to presidential candidate. By nature, we have a deep sense of humility in this state, and I think people have to recognize that somebody from this state has every reason in the world and every right to participate in this debate and be part of this campaign."

Before we headed to Independence, I watched Vilsack try to make this case to some potential caucus-goers in Dubuque. Speaking to about 125 people who'd gathered in the rotunda of the river city's main library, he started his spiel by playing up his home-field advantage, pointing out a campaign aide who's a "Dubuquer." He pledged that, as president, he would expand health care, make the United States more energy-secure, and end the war in Iraq. But the heart of his speech was devoted to addressing the elephant in the room. "Now I know what you're thinking," he said after ticking off his campaign promises. "You're thinking, 'To do all that, you've got to get elected. How can you possibly get elected? ... You were our governor and we kind of liked you, you were a good guy, but, gee, you're running against all these rock stars.' " The crowd laughed—albeit nervously, as if he had indeed divined their secret thoughts. He waited for the laughter to die down. "Folks," he continued, "I'm not a rock

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star, I'm the first to admit that. But I'm rock solid."

Vilsack went on to make a case for his candidacy that tried to blend Iowans' state pride with their famous fixation on electability. "It's not enough just to get Democrats," he said. "You've got to be able to reach over and get the folks in the middle. ... They're in cities like Dubuque, they're in small towns like the ones we've got here in Iowa, they're in Missouri, they're in Ohio, they're in Kentucky and Tennessee, they're in Colorado, they're in all of those states that we have not been able to win in." He told the crowd that he alone among the Democratic candidates could reach those voters and win in those places—largely because he was an Iowan. "I'm from a small town in southeast Iowa, and I live on Main Street. And those are Main Street values that have been with me," he said. "Your values are with me. It is your values that this country needs ... and it's your values that are reflective of the values in those states that we have to have to win."

Afterward, in the car, Vilsack says it's precisely these sorts of gatherings that will eventually lead to his victory in Iowa. "In a caucus state, you build a campaign brick by brick, one person at a time, and that's what we're doing," he says. "We could have an event where 1,000 people show up or 2,000 people show up, but that's not the intimacy that Iowans want." The big crowds the rock stars are drawing, he maintains, are meaningless; what matters in Iowa, he explains, is getting commitments from voters that they'll caucus for you. "I'm told John Edwards had an event in Johnson County. Five hundred people showed up. ... I don't think they took a name," he says. "I don't know how many names Senator Clinton received [when she came through Iowa a few days earlier], but I know they don't have an office, they don't have a telephone number." (Vilsack, by contrast, already has six offices and 15 trained staff in Iowa; and in January, his campaign made 19,000 live phone calls to Iowans.)

Indeed, Vilsack argues that the fact that he has to compete so hard against the rock stars in Iowa actually helps him, since people won't be able to dismiss his victory in the caucus as "expected"—as they did with Iowa Senator Tom Harkin in 1992, after the other presidential candidates ceded his home state's caucus to him. "Do you think Hillary Clinton was playing for second when she brought 44 people here with her this past weekend?" Vilsack asks. "Do you think Barack Obama, when he comes here again, is playing for second? How could John Edwards play for second? He can't get by without Iowa. They're playing to win. So this is a full-scale, knockdown, drag-out deal."

Finally, we come to the exit for Independence, and Vilsack pulls off the highway. Slowly cruising into the deserted downtown, he breathes a sigh of relief. "I thought I did pretty well," he says of his driving performance, as the aide and I eagerly concur. His focus now off the road and on the campaign appearance ahead, Vilsack asks his aide for a breath mint—to combat the onions on his cheeseburger—and a quick rundown of a few notables who will be at the event. He parks the car and heads into the restaurant, where he'll deliver the same spiel he gave in Dubuque to a group of about 75 people who have gathered in a basement banquet room. When it's over, they'll give Vilsack a nice round of applause. Most of them will shake his hand, some will ask for his autograph, and a few will even fill out a card committing to caucus for him. And then, when the last of them has left the restaurant, Vilsack will get into his car and go back on the highway to drive the 150 miles through the snow to Des Moines, where he'll catch a few hours of sleep before heading out the next day to continue his uphill battle.

As Vilsack's SUV disappears into the blustery night, I think back to something he'd said during the drive to Independence, when the snow was coming down hard and he was pushing forward to make it to the meeting on time. I'd asked him about Joe Lieberman and his place in U.S. politics. I was curious to see whether Vilsack would take the opportunity to distance himself from his old Democratic Leadership Council ally now that Lieberman was publicly flirting with endorsing a Republican for president and had become a pariah to many of the people who'd be voting in Democratic primaries. Vilsack didn't take the bait, but his answer was revealing in another way. "His place in politics?" he asked me in response, chuckling. "I mean, honestly, all of us are going to be footnotes with the exception of a few of us who end up being elected president," he said, pulling into the left lane to pass a car that had slowed to a crawl in front of us. "But being a footnote's not bad," he went on. "It's better than not being in the book at all." ■

Eastern Europe's turn right.

Popular Front

BY JACQUES RUPNIK

EVER SINCE THE collapse of communism in 1989, Central and Eastern Europe was supposed to be a success story for liberalism. As Russia was backsliding from democracy in the late '90s, a liberal political culture appeared to be developing in the polities of its neighbors to the west. From the Baltic to Hungary, elections were held, parties were formed, and the "spirit of capitalism"—famously linked by Max Weber to Protestant ethics—seemed to take root, even in countries like Poland, where the traditional strength of the Catholic Church and nationalist sentiment might have suggested

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that market liberalism would prove an awkward fit. In short, here was one corner of the world where liberal democracy really did seem to be on the march.

Unfortunately, recent developments complicate this picture considerably. Right-wing populists in Poland and left-wing populists in Slovakia govern with extremist parties as part of their coalitions. In Hungary, the main opposition party, Fidesz, threatened last October to bring down the country's democratically elected government through a wave of street demonstrations. Bulgaria's recent presidential election pitted an ex-communist against a proto-fascist who says he hates Turks, Gypsies, and Jews. (The ex-communist won.) The problems of the Czech Republic, perhaps the most Western of the former communist countries, seem relatively benign by comparison: There, post-election bickering recently prevented the formation of a government coalition for seven months.

Meanwhile, according to a recent Gallup International poll, only one-third of Central and Eastern European citizens say they trust democracy. What's more, just 22 percent of those polled responded affirmatively to the question, "Do you think your voice matters?" In a region where Western values were once thought to be triumphant, liberal democracy is now experiencing its first major test: the rise of populism.

OBVIOUSLY, THE SITUATIONS vary from country to country. Still, broad trends can be discerned, and each one has something to do with resurgent populist movements. These movements are not exactly anti-democratic—indeed, they claim to represent the true voice of the people and frequently demand new elections or referenda—but, rather, anti-liberal. If democracy means popular legitimacy and constitutionalism, then the populists accept the former and reject the latter—that is, they distrust the idea that constitutional norms should trump traditional values and majority sentiment.

Poland has been a trendsetter for the region since the conservative Kaczynski twins assumed power—one as president, the other as prime minister—in 2005 and 2006. Their association in government with the extremist League of Polish Families produced a political program based on the assumption that Catholic and national values should prevail over permissive liberalism on issues like abortion and gay rights. In Slovakia, the extremist Slovak National Party has joined the governing coalition, raising concerns about the future of ethnic pluralism in that country. The party's leader, Ján Slota, has said he would not mind sending the leader of the Hungarian minority to Mars "with a one-way ticket." The common pattern here is one of acute polarization: Eastern Europe's populists do not act as if they face a political opponent (or ethnic, religious, or sexual minority) with whom they can negotiate but rather an enemy whom they must destroy.

There is an economic component to this anti-liberal sentiment as well. After 15 years of unabashed free-market policies, the populists want to reassert the power of the state. It is easy to see the appeal of this position: In Poland, where the unemployment rate is approximately 15 percent, there have been plenty of losers in the new liberal order. Since it was often socialist parties in Eastern Europe that implemented free-market politics over the past 15 years, it is not surprising that qualms about the new economic order have come from the right. Hence, the populists have married cultural conservatism to economic nationalism.

Another common feature of the populist tide is anti-elitism. Governments in this region have come and gone over the last 15 years, but all have more or less followed an elite consensus on key issues. Now, the populist challenge to the technocratic elites who pushed through the reforms of the '90s comes in two guises: an anti-corruption drive on the one hand and "decommunisation" on the other. Poland has seen an interesting combination of the two: Populists have denounced the 1989 compromise between moderate dissident elites and moderate communist elites, which made possible a peaceful end to communism. This agreement, populists allege, allowed former communists to convert their political power into economic power and caused widespread corruption during the privatization process. The Kaczynski twins—as well as the leaders of Fidesz in Budapest—have argued for banning from public office anyone who collaborated with the communist-era secret police. It is ironic that the first major casualty of this atmosphere in Poland was the Archbishop of Warsaw—a representative of the very institution the populists venerate for both its moral rigor and its role in defeating communism.

The final key feature of the new populism is a wariness of European integration. The pro-European coalitions that dominated the politics of the previous decade disintegrated after most countries in the region joined the European Union in May 2004. (The Polish, Czech, and Hungarian prime ministers all resigned within six months of fulfilling this goal.) Today, the populists present themselves as the only defenders of national sovereignty against "external threats," as one of the Kaczynski twins put it. The European Union is the perfect bête noire for the populists, since—as an economically liberal, socially tolerant, elitist venture—it combines many of their targets under one umbrella.

And so the assumption—widely held in the West—that joining the European Union would cause Eastern European countries to consolidate their new democracies now seems to have been overly optimistic. Before becoming EU members, many countries appeared to be moving toward liberalism. But their current message to Western Europe seems to be, "Now we can show you who we really are." Indeed, one senses a curious satisfaction in the capitals of former Warsaw Pact countries at joining Europe in order to oppose those who, for half a century, built a European identity without them—those who long spoke on behalf of Europe without taking *Eastern* Europe into account. Tired of being pupils, the populist nationalists seem to be longing to explain the kind of Europe they have in mind: a Christian

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Europe composed of nation-states, not a materialist, decadent, supranational project.

AS A RESULT, the rise of the populists has a number of implications for the future of the European Union. The most obvious is that further enlargements of the organization seem unlikely in the near future. You cannot describe the European Union as a menace and, at the same time, demand that the benefits of membership be extended farther east to a long list of candidates. In addition, the populists could weaken the bond that ties member countries together. This could lead to the renationalization of economic policy in EU states.

At the same time, the European Union may also work as a check on the populists. There is precedent for this: European outrage helped to marginalize far-right leader Jörg Haider, who became part of Austria's coalition government in 2000 but has since seen his political fortunes decline. In recent years, populist nationalists have joined and left government coalitions in Italy, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The lesson for Eastern European newcomers is that the influence of nationalist populism can be diluted by membership in a shared European polity. Indeed, it is worth noting that 72 percent of Poles say they are satisfied with their EU membership, and most express greater trust in European institutions than in their own government.

Moreover, time may be working against the populists. Throughout history, populists have often won elections by railing against elites, only to be thrown out of office after becoming identified with the power structure they once denounced. In other words, while the rise of Eastern European populism and nationalism is cause for concern, this is no return to the 1930s. Liberalism faces populist challenges almost everywhere in Europe. Now Eastern Europe has simply joined the club. ■

A new health care plan.
Vouchsafe

BY EZEKIEL J. EMANUEL AND VICTOR R. FUCHS

REQUIRING PEOPLE TO buy health insurance as if it were a driver's license has become the health care policy initiative du jour. This "individual mandate" model got its first official embrace when former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, working with his Democratic state legislature, used such a scheme to cover all state residents. In January, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed to implement a similar program. And, within the last few days, former Senator John Edwards, a leading Democratic presidential candidate, proposed using the same basic structure on a national scale.

It's great that so many prominent public officials are embracing universal health care, an idea whose time has clearly come. But it's not great to see these public officials embracing such a flawed model of reform. These reforms don't envision a wholesale reinvention of U.S. health care. Instead, they attempt to graft universal coverage onto existing arrangements. That's a mistake, because only comprehensive reforms will eliminate the inefficiencies and perverse incentives of the existing system—a series of flaws that leaves Americans with the worst of all worlds. In the United States, life expectancy is lower and infant mortality is higher than it is in other developed countries. Even so, the United States spends $7,000 per person per year on health care—almost twice as much as is spent on citizens of other high-income countries.

Proponents of individual mandates and other, more incremental reforms insist they are merely being practical—that, if you try to give everybody insurance *and* make it more efficient, the political system will reject it. But there may be a politically realistic way to establish universal coverage while addressing the more fundamental flaws in U.S. health care. It's an idea we first introduced two years ago: universal health vouchers.

IDEALLY, HEALTH CARE reform ought to accomplish several goals, starting with universality: All Americans should be covered by a high-quality basic plan, which they can keep whether they change jobs or marital status. But there are other critical goals, too. Americans want to be able to choose their hospital and physicians; they want the ability to change health plans and to buy extra services. Quality is obviously essential; care should be clinically sound and safe. And then there is efficiency. Over time, expenditures should not rise faster than can be justified by higher national income and advances in health care.

Even the most thoughtfully constructed individual mandate reform can make only partial progress on these fronts. An individual mandate would prop up employment-based insurance, which is inefficient and inequitable. It would also increase the number of Americans dependent on income-tested subsidies for programs like Medicaid, which runs up administrative costs (government has to sort out who's eligible for assistance) while providing many of these people with substandard insurance (since the programs' low reimbursements frequently limit access to doctors).

An individual mandate would not address major problems in the organization and delivery of care, nor would it end the squandering of money on lavish executive salaries and perks. And, precisely because an individual mandate would leave the present system for financing medical care fundamentally intact, it's hard to see how it would do much to reduce current overall costs—or future inflation.

A voucher scheme, by contrast, seems far more likely to accomplish these goals. Here's how it would work:

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Once a year, all Americans would choose a health plan from among five to eight alternatives. All the plans would be free. All the plans would also meet certain criteria—minimal co-payments and deductibles, plus benefits modeled (initially) on those in the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan. By law, the plans could not discriminate among customers. They would have to accept anybody and promise unconditional renewal, regardless of preexisting medical conditions or other factors that might put people at higher risk of getting sick.

Who would make the decisions about which plans people could buy? Regional health boards would screen the plans and then monitor their performance over time, using criteria set by a federal health board—with the whole system operating like the Federal Reserve system now does. The health boards would also be responsible for paying the plans. Money would come down from the federal health board, which would decide how to divide health care funds geographically. At that point, the regional boards would pay each plan, based on the number of enrollees in any given year—but with one key adjustment. The regional boards would adjust payments so that plans attracting sicker beneficiaries would get more money. This, along with the prohibitions on denying coverage to people with preexisting conditions, would prevent insurers from profiting by cherry-picking the healthiest subscribers.

So that's how the money would get from the health boards to the health plans. But how would the health boards get their money in the first place? Under the scheme we have in mind, the money would come from the federal government, which would, in turn, draw upon two revenue sources. First, the government would repeal the existing tax exemption on employer-sponsored health insurance—an exemption that would become obsolete once employers stopped providing their workers with basic insurance. That change would raise $200 billion a year. To cover the remaining cost—some $750 billion a year initially—the government would then impose a value-added tax (VAT). Businesses pay VAT at every step of the production and distribution process, adding the cost as they go, so that at the end of the line—when a consumer pays for a good—the consumer ends up picking up the tab at higher prices. The new VAT would be "dedicated," generating money only for health care. A tax of between 10 and 12 percent should be enough to pay for our scheme.

That may sound like a lot—imposing, in effect, a 10 to 12 percent national sales tax—but average Americans would come out ahead. As employers stopped spending money on employee health benefits, wages would go up by 10 to 13 percent. Meanwhile, Americans would no longer have to pay any premiums whatsoever for basic medical coverage. The voucher program would phase out Medicaid and, eventually, Medicare; and, as the programs disappeared, the taxes that support them would disappear, too, leaving the average American even better off. (Medicare would not enroll new members, but it would continue to serve current enrollees until they died or decided—as some might—to opt for the voucher system instead.)

Admittedly, using a VAT would be controversial, because some people believe VATs are too regressive. But the program as a whole would be highly progressive. Indeed, all countries that provide universal health care have a VAT—including the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, and Germany. Many liberal analysts, such as Robert H. Frank in *Luxury Fever* and Ed McCaffery in *Fair Not Flat: How to Make the Tax System Better and Simpler*, have recommended a VAT because it taxes spending, not work or saving.

Overall, a voucher system would certainly cost no more than the present system. And, over time, it would actually cost less, as it would hold down health care inflation. Since the VAT money would be "dedicated," the amount collected from the VAT would set a hard limit on the cost of the basic benefits package—and, ultimately, the services that insurance coverage could purchase. The amount collected would rise as the economy grew. But, if Americans wanted health care spending to grow even more rapidly, they would have to agree to a higher VAT rate. In other words, there would be no open-ended entitlement leading to open-ended inflation, as there is today.

The voucher system would also foster competition among health plans. Because health plans would get a fixed payment per enrollee in exchange for providing a defined set of benefits, they would have to compete for enrollees based on quality and service. They would have a strong incentive to be efficient and to collaborate with their doctors and hospitals to cut down on waste and marginal medical services. Americans who wanted additional services could still get them. But, to do so, they'd have to spend their own after-tax dollars—giving them an incentive to spend judiciously and get value for their money.

To further cut down on costs, we propose using a small portion of the VAT to fund a new, independent Institute of Technology and Outcomes Assessment that would evaluate the effectiveness, cost, and value of new technologies and new applications of existing technologies. The data developed by the Institute would ensure that technologies added to the basic benefit package by the federal health board would be cost-effective. These reports, in turn, would send a signal to drug and device companies to focus their research and development on cost-effective interventions.

These steps would amount to an ambitious overhaul of U.S. health care. But an ambitious overhaul is exactly what U.S. health care needs. Pushing for lesser solutions is the policy equivalent of prescribing aspirin and Band-Aids for cancer—in other words, a form of malpractice. ■

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A missed opportunity in Iraq.

The Wrong Surge

BY LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

RAMADI, IRAQ

IT'S THE SECOND week of December, yet apart from a palm tree strung with Christmas lights outside the headquarters of the First Armored Division's First Brigade Combat Team (1-1 AD), Ramadi shows no trace of the season. But, at the nearby house of Sheik Abdul Sattar, nothing can interrupt the festive spirit—or the sheik. Waving a lit cigarette, the former Al Qaeda ally has been advertising his fealty to the American cause for nearly an hour now. He insists his militia be set loose alongside the Marine river patrols that ply the Euphrates each night: "We burn the terrorist boats now!" Army Colonel Sean MacFarland, a lanky man from upstate New York with an uncommonly self-effacing demeanor for a brigade commander, gently declines the offer. "Then give me one helicopter," the sheik suggests. "We will fight in Baghdad!" Encouraged by MacFarland's chuckles, Sattar claps excitedly. "After that, we fight in Afghanistan; we fight in Darfur!"

Alas, Sattar's military challenges run somewhat closer to home. Even as he offers MacFarland his transcontinental assistance, the sheik's walkie-talkie crackles and panicked tribesmen on the other end relay news of insurgents besieging them at a nearby police station. MacFarland gestures quietly toward a captain across the room, who hurries outside. "We'll bring in air," MacFarland assures the sheik, who's so busy shouting and being shouted at that it isn't clear he actually hears the soft-spoken colonel. "So, um, get your men inside so we don't hit them." In the space of a couple of minutes, radio antennae relay a flurry of coordinates; one of the Marine F-18s above Ramadi banks toward the insurgents; a 500-pound bomb incinerates them; smoke swirls. As Sattar paces the courtyard with his walkie-talkie, broadcasting orders for an operation his American counterpart has already brought to a decisive end, MacFarland surveys the sand-blown landscape. "The sheik's a little bit of a warlord," he shrugs.

No one directed the colonel to recruit hitherto enemy sheiks to the American side, much less to raise a local force of their tribesmen. He just decided to do it. He's not the only one: The Army's combat brigades all fight their own unique wars. "There hasn't been any coherent guidance," says Andrew Krepinevich, a retired Army officer whose chronicle of counterinsurgency in Southeast Asia, *The Army and Vietnam*, supplied the foundation for the Bush team's "clear, hold, and build" doctrine. "So, instead of a symphony, what you have is a collection of jazz bands." Some perform wonderfully, others disastrously. But the better ones, like MacFarland's, seem to multiply in direct proportion to their distance from the war's managers in Baghdad, who have always been more attuned to operations in the city around them. Largely insulated from a broken strategy, the counterinsurgency in the provinces has yielded a better way.

David Petraeus, the new commanding general in Iraq and himself a veteran of the counterinsurgency in the provinces, will now apply that better way to Iraq's capital. The administration has dispatched Petraeus with a mandate to execute what the White House's Iraq Strategy Review calls an "operational shift" toward "population security." Good. The Pentagon has also published Petraeus's counterinsurgency field manual, which finally cements into doctrine the well-established array of procedures and techniques for counterinsurgent warfare. Also good. There's just one problem: Having waited nearly four years to apply the counterinsurgency template to Baghdad, the White House has sent Petraeus and his surge force to fight what is, in fact, no longer an insurgency. And by focusing so exclusively on the civil war in the capital, which the United States cannot win, the administration may wind up forfeiting the counterinsurgency war in the provinces, which it still can.

FOR ALL THE euphoria that has accompanied the elevation of Petraeus and his "new" counterinsurgency strategy, brigade commanders have been doing exactly what it recommends for years. The first to do so was Colonel H.R. McMaster, whose 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (3rd ACR) famously pacified the city of Tall Afar in 2005. In line with the importance counterinsurgency theory attaches to population security, 3rd ACR cleared the city, poured millions of dollars into infrastructure projects, swelled the ranks of its police force, and planted itself in the center of the city. Last March, President Bush devoted an entire address to the lessons of Tall Afar, offering it up as a model for his new "clear, hold, and build" strategy.

Then an odd thing happened: nothing. Rather than enshrine the lessons of the city in a coherent approach to the war, officials in Washington and Baghdad argued that U.S. forces were supposed to be moving *out* of the cities, not into them. In any case, they said, the counterinsurgency template in Tall Afar could never be duplicated outside of Tall Afar.

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But it could—and it was. Anbar province, which America's Baghdad-centric policy has always regarded as something of an outlier, offers a typical example. Last August, Marine Colonel Peter Devlin authored a report that described Al Qaeda as an "integral part of the social fabric" in Anbar and cautioned that "nearly all government institutions from the village to provincial levels have disintegrated or have been thoroughly corrupted and infiltrated by Al Qaeda in Iraq."

Applying textbook methods of counterinsurgency to Anbar's capital, MacFarland has reversed the trend. The new counterinsurgency manual instructs, "Identity-focused insurgencies can be defeated in some cases by co-opting the responsible traditional authority figure." MacFarland has courted such figures relentlessly. When 1-1 AD arrived in Ramadi last June, it was welcomed by six cooperative tribes and twelve hostile ones. Today, it boasts the support of 15 and the enmity of just three. Of the tribal leaders whose allegiance MacFarland has gained, Sattar wields by far the most power. The sheik heads up an alliance called the "Awakening," a collection of Anbar tribes who have thrown their lot in with the Americans. Seated beneath the Awakening's gilded flag, which he designed and which features a sword, scales of justice, and, less explicably, a coffee pot, he recounts his three arrests by the U.S. units that operated here at the beginning of the war. How, then, was he converted to the cause of his onetime jailers? Sattar credits Al Qaeda's excesses in Ramadi—including the murder of two of his brothers—and the fact that "the old U.S. leadership here was a disaster, but now the Americans work with us."

Another of Ramadi's sheiks, Ahmed Bezia—who, unlike Sattar, favors Western attire and has built himself a full-scale replica of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, albeit painted salmon—explains that, in a gathering of Ramadi's elders, the sheiks signed a document pledging, in Bezia's words, "that any U.S. losses are tribal losses." At his headquarters later, MacFarland shows me a map of Ramadi color-coded to reflect tribal boundaries. Pointing to the western outskirts of the city, he explains, "We were hit almost every day in these places before [the alliance], but we haven't been hit there in months." Pressed on the wisdom of handing Ramadi over to militias with no allegiance to the government in Baghdad, MacFarland says simply, "There's no government here." In fact, not even the capital's death spiral seems to register in Ramadi, where "most people have probably never even met a Shiite," according to MacFarland. "It's not about a civil war here. It's about Al Qaeda."

PETRAEUS'S COUNTERINSURGENCY MANUAL also advises recruiting police forces from the local population, a practice MacFarland has taken to its farthest boundary in Ramadi, where tribes even have their own police stations. The success of the strategy can be gleaned in the number of recruits swelling the ranks, which contained 140 officers in May and have over 2,000 today. Intrigued by the figure, I join a squat bulldog of a commander named Jim Lechner on a patrol to Ramadi's Al Jazeera police station. A few months ago, a suicide bomber ignited an oil truck at Al Jazeera's gate, drenching the station, along with its Iraqi and American tenants, in burning fuel. 1-1 AD will soon christen a new station here, but, in the meantime, Ramadi's police chiefs have gathered for a meeting down by the river, about a mile away. Lechner sets off on foot, and we proceed down a dirt road that winds through a dried-up orange grove and toward the bank of the Euphrates, where a dozen or so police chiefs wait in a circle of plastic chairs. They set upon Lechner, complaining that Baghdad refuses to pay their latest recruits. "I am Sheik Sattar's cousin!" one shouts. "I represent him!" The chiefs crowd closer, but Lechner seems unfazed. "This is nothing, a tantrum," Lechner tells me. "I've had a hundred of them throw their weapons in the dirt." Even this low-grade riot conceals progress: In a war where police recruiting drives often do not generate a single applicant, today's uproar comes as the result of a recruiting glut.

In Thomas Ricks's *Fiasco*, former 82nd Airborne Division Commander Major General Charles Swannack recounts how he cautioned that "al Anbar province wasn't ready for [a counterinsurgency campaign], and maybe never, because they didn't want us downtown." MacFarland has upended Swannack's admonition, putting nearly all of his combat forces in the downtown of Anbar's most dangerous city. The logic is straightforward: The path to defeating an insurgency runs through the population, without whose support insurgents can be forced to fight in the open. Securing control of the population depends, in turn, on guaranteeing its physical security and—through social programs, civic assistance, and the like—its "hearts and minds."

This theory plays out in the streets of Ramadi. The areas where 1-1 AD has yet to erect combat outposts (COPs) contain no trace of life whatsoever. En route to COP Falcon in southern Ramadi, the landscape resembles one of those aerial photos of Berlin in 1945—only, seen from the ground, the wreckage appears even worse. Then something unreal appears: A block of utter devastation gives way to a block that bustles with shops, women carrying bags of groceries, the everyday vibrancy of a living community.

COP Falcon, which consists of a couple of abandoned homes and a row of tanks parked in a bulldozed clearing, oversees the avenue, guaranteeing its security and functioning as a magnet for daily life. In the days after the COP was first established, explains Captain Michael Bajema, "We had taxis full of gunmen, 50 at a time, coming at us." But the violence receded here once the next COP went up a few blocks away. It's a familiar pattern: The insurgents contest each new COP—MacFarland has installed 24 in all—but eventually fall back to areas with no U.S. presence. Today, says Bajema, "We've got the closest school open with 700 kids every day, we've built a [sewage] pumping station, we've got 200 people coming into our [aid station] every day." More to the point, "People now tell us where IEDs are, who planted them, everything."

Since 1-1 AD's arrival, enemy attacks have declined by

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40 percent and IED attacks in particular by 60 percent. Tellingly, the violence here now centers around the only two neighborhoods where the brigade has yet to install COPs—a shrinking zone, as Americans now control 80 percent of the city compared with 15 percent when 1-1 AD first arrived.

BEFORE LEAVING IRAQ, I head from Ramadi to Fallujа and then Baghdad, where I spend a week with the Tenth Mountain Division's Second Brigade Combat Team (2-10 Mtn). The brigade, which officers at the Pentagon recommend as another model of counterinsurgency, operates in the "Triangle of Death," an insurgent corridor southwest of the capital and adjacent to Anbar. Colonel Michael Kershaw, an East Texan who buzzes with frenetic energy, commands with the benefit of a background in irregular warfare, having served multiple tours in the Rangers and in a globe's worth of unconventional postings. And, in the operational schemes favored by 2-10 Mtn, it shows. On a helicopter flight south from Baghdad to Yusufiyah, a panorama unfolds wholly unlike the polluted and broken capital behind us. The debris of the city quickly gives way to a stunning landscape, with canals and dikes ordering lush farmland into neat grids. The terrain resembles Southeast Asia's and in more ways than one. Anticipating the counterinsurgency manual's warning not to "concentrate military forces in large bases for protection," Kershaw has his soldiers fanned out among the reeds, in boats patrolling the Euphrates, melted into population centers.

The objective of a recent push by the brigade stands about 25 miles southwest of Baghdad—a tangle of smokestacks and industrial wreckage known as the Yusufiyah power plant, which insurgents held for three years with impunity (and where they butchered two abducted American soldiers last year). As in Tall Afar and Ramadi, the combat phase of operations here was a prelude to counterinsurgent operations of arguably greater consequence. At a house in Sadr Yusufiyah that 2-10 Mtn uses as a patrol base, Captain Palmer Phillips says the locals didn't know what to think when his company moved in: "There had never been any Americans here before." After the company medevaced a baby dying of a respiratory illness, Iraqis began to show up at the gate for medical aid, for passes to use restricted routes, and, eventually, to provide the Americans with a steady flow of tips. Here, as in Ramadi, attacks have fallen off sharply.

Flying out of Baghdad, the impression that commanders like Kershaw and MacFarland have devised a way forward gives way to a cold truth: The problem in Iraq has never been a lack of military capability. The problem has been confusion—at the top—over how to use it. There has always been a self-defeating tautology at work in the management of this war: The absence of guidance from Baghdad encourages commanders to innovate, but it also means their innovations aren't elevated to the level of guidance. Lacking a framework for fighting the insurgency, one brigade confines itself to a city's edge, another blasts its way through, and a third finally gets it right. Across the country, the pattern repeats itself over and over. Hence the awful question mark that may double as the epitaph of the U.S. enterprise in Iraq: What if there were one true path all along?

IF THERE WERE, historians will trace it back through the Triangle of Death in 2007, Ramadi in 2006, Tall Afar in 2005, and, finally, to Mosul in 2004. There, General Petraeus first previewed some of the techniques and methods of counterinsurgency employed by the brigade commanders but never promulgated as a countrywide policy—until now.

The news that Petraeus will return to Iraq breaks just as I return to the United States. Curious to know what he thinks of the appointment, I arrange to meet an officer close to Petraeus at a restaurant in Washington, D.C. The officer, who, like Petraeus, served in Iraq and chafed against what he regarded as a broken strategy, appears subdued. "We'll quiet Baghdad down for a while," he says. "But then what?"

Indeed. Washington's belated embrace of Petraeus and

Sheik Abdul Sattar and Colonel Sean MacFarland plot counterinsurgency.

1-1 AD, COMBAT CAMERA

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his counterinsurgency program undeniably comes as good news. But it also comes very late. Two years ago, before a one-sided insurgency spiraled into a two-sided civil war in the capital, the lessons of the provinces would have applied to Baghdad, too. They might even have a year ago. The methods for quelling insurgencies and sectarian violence, after all, are not inherently incompatible. In Tall Afar and Mahmudiya, for instance, the same visible profile that counterinsurgency theory relies on to achieve population security doubles as a buffer between Sunni and Shia, in much the same way the Army employed the technique to broker peace between Serb and Muslim in Bosnia. A brigade that I visited last year (1-10 Mtn) extended the logic directly to the heart of Baghdad, where it operated continuously along the fault lines of mixed neighborhoods. "Commanders usually deal with sectarian feuds and the insurgency in the same way," says Kalev Sepp, a counterinsurgency expert at the Naval Postgraduate School. "It always comes back to fundamental issues of diffusing violence and political challenges in a way that's unique to locales."

But the challenges in Baghdad have gone beyond the realm of technique. Whereas, a year ago, the perpetrators of sectarian violence mostly belonged to organized militias or terrorist groups, the city's spiral has now loosed neighbor against neighbor, street against street. A senior officer whose unit operates in Amiriyah, a mostly Sunni neighborhood where Petraeus intends to establish patrol bases, says that Shia routinely find themselves burned out of their homes, subjected to threats of abduction, or ejected from his sector altogether. They suffer these depredations, moreover, at the hands of people they've known their entire lives. Population security depends on the assumption that U.S. forces can insulate the populace from insurgents and militias. But how do you isolate the population from the population?

In an insurgency, Petraeus's manual declares, "Victory is achieved when the populace consents to the government's legitimacy." The plan for Baghdad, however, depends on a government rapidly forfeiting any claim to legitimacy—and on the impartiality of sectarian-minded Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki. Official corruption runs rampant in the capital, and sectarian identities have hardened to the point that ministries operate by tribe rather than by function. Though many units of the Iraqi army now operate quite effectively against the insurgency, commanders who contest the militias still tend to vanish abruptly. Then, too, Petraeus has said he may draw on the 150,000-man Iraqi Facilities Protection Service—a goon squad whose ranks Maliki himself has described as "more dangerous than the militias." Forces like this explain why Sunnis look to the insurgency for protection in the first place.

Will the Americans now provide that protection? Petraeus's manual implies that 120,000 troops would be required to secure a city the size of Baghdad. But, in a city of six million, he will have to make do with an additional 17,000. Subtract from that number soldiers in support functions and soldiers patrolling in shifts, and the surge boosts effective force levels on the streets at any given time by maybe 4,000 or 5,000. "In 1968, General Westmoreland asked for 206,000 additional troops in Vietnam," says Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel and professor of international relations at Boston University. "That's a surge. This is far, far too puny to make a difference."

Despite all this, administration officials and their allies in Congress have advertised the plan as a last chance to shape events in America's favor. But establishing patrol bases, gaining the trust of the population, generating intelligence tips—all of these things count merely as the first steps of what, at least in the capital, promises to be a very long process. With the military clock in Baghdad badly out of sync with the political clock in Washington, however, patience has nearly run out in our own capital.

Where all this leads is clear. Writing in *Parameters*, the journal of the Army War College, retired Colonel Stuart Herrington notes that "having wasted more than three years (until 1968) pursuing a flawed strategy, the Pentagon lost the support of the American population, and was not given the time to get it right, even when it was clear that General Creighton Abrams' pacification and Vietnamization approach might have worked." In Iraq, too, the Pentagon wasted more than three years pursuing a flawed strategy and, as a result, may never "get it right" in Baghdad: Having been disregarded for so long, the lessons of the provinces probably now only apply in the provinces.

Given this disconnect, why not assign Petraeus and his counterinsurgency strategy to the war in which they still have some pertinence? The point wouldn't be to draw down to a baseline force in Baghdad, much less to forfeit the city. Rather, it would be to allocate relatively more attention and resources—beginning with something more than the paltry fraction of the surge force destined for Anbar—to a place where what has been billed as a show of American resolve wouldn't be as likely to collapse that resolve. As it stands now, Washington's decision to twin its fate to Baghdad's means that, if the city careens away, the United States will walk away not only from the civil war it could not quell—but also from the insurgency it could.

With the spotlight on Baghdad's sectarian blood feud, the distinction between these wars has been utterly lost. The latest White House review of Iraq strategy replaces its "previous key assumption"—that the "primary challenge is a Sunni-based insurgency"—with a new key assumption: "[The] primary challenge is violent extremists from multiple communities." As a statement of policy, this formulation is so vague it defeats its own purpose. "Multiple communities" do not pose the primary challenge to the United States. The Sunni insurgency does. It is the insurgency that inflicts nearly every American casualty. It is the insurgency that draws, more than ever, from the ranks of Al Qaeda, the very enemy against which the war on terrorism was declared in the first place—and an enemy that makes its base not in Baghdad but in the provinces. That is where, even today, the lessons of a better war still apply. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Being Watched

IN THIS AGE CRAMMED WITH STATISTICS, one tauntingly important item is missing, and always will be. How many people on the face of the earth spend their lives spying—professionally—on other people? The media continually serve up lashings of stuff about secret agents and security personnel. Sometimes it seems that almost half the global population spies on the other half, with a remnant reserved to spy on the spies. Of course there have always been spies, but the growth in electronic means of spying, in doomsday weaponry, in the hovering sense that the whole planet may be made to conform to one set of principles (whatever they are), and that espionage helps one set or another—all these matters make spying a constant in the back of the head.

THE DECOMPOSITION OF THE SOUL
(Image Creation)

THE LIVES OF OTHERS
(Sony Pictures Classics)

Two new German films bring it to the forefront. It is mere coincidence that they arrive together, but they make an excellent pair—not only because of their subject but because of their quality as films. Both of them are about the Stasi, the secret police force of the German Democratic Republic. (Stasi is an abbreviation for *Staatssicherheit*, State Security.) Its chief job was to sniff out dissidents, spy on them to gather evidence, and then deal with them.

One of the films is a documentary, thoughtfully made. The title is **THE DECOMPOSITION OF THE SOUL**, and florid though that may sound, it is exact. Nina Toussaint and Massimo Iannetta, the directors, keep their film entirely within the buildings of Hohenschönhausen in East Berlin, which was the Stasi jail and interrogation center. The place is now completely deserted, but the directors make its blank walls and steel doors and antiseptic office furniture redolent with what happened there.

The subject is not torture in the Nazi way. (Some physical torture is mentioned, but it is not the center.) Two people, a man and a woman who may not even know each other, who had been Stasi prisoners in this place some forty years earlier—the film was made in 2002—take us on a tour. The film treats them separately, and each explains in simple yet seasoned terms what happened to him or her, as they show us their cells and the various offices where they were questioned. The passage of time has provided them with at least a mask of philosophical consideration.

Sigrid was a dental assistant who had been hustled off by agents one morning in 1964 and held incommunicado. (Much later she learned that her husband had been arrested, too.) She was accused of helping students who wanted to escape, and she explained what the circumstances were, which her interrogators didn't believe. (There had also been visits to West Berlin to visit her child, who was hospitalized there.) This questioning went on for nineteen months, here and in another prison, burrowing for her confederates and plans and opinions. Quite calmly she describes to us the method of interrogation. Smooth. Sometimes coffee was offered, sometimes cigarettes. The only physical harassments, clever ones, were being seated on a stool with her hands under her for many hours, being deprived of sleep, having whatever sleep was allowed interrupted.

The interrogation of Hartmut was longer and deeper because he had once been a Leninist and had changed—and had helped people to escape East Germany. (After all the questionings, he served a five-and-a-half-year prison term.) Hartmut recreates the gist of the interrogations. They were sometimes almost in the vein of café conversations, but he felt that the questions dug more and more deeply into the core of his being. Hartmut understood (as did Sigrid) that the Stasi were actually less interested in confessions about actions and associations than in something more profound. They wanted to decompose and recompose his soul. (Sigrid's and Hartmut's comments are sometimes braided with excerpts from a book by Jürgen Fuchs, a writer who had been through similar experiences and had been released.)

The art of Iannetta and Toussaint is to make this steely building assume a species of being. As Sigrid or Hartmut talks or as Fuchs is quoted, we frequently see corridors, glass-brick windows that admit light but through which one cannot look, a typewriter, a telephone, just by themselves. A strange phenomenon occurs: the camera itself becomes one of the prisoners in this place. The camera itself becomes another victim of the tacit torment in the film's title.

This introduction to Stasi methods is the perfect prelude to **THE LIVES OF OTHERS**. Written and directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, it is a fiction film that deals with a Stasi case. A successful playwright in East Berlin, Georg Dreyman, is suspected by Culture Minister Hempf of political wavering. Hempf orders a Stasi investigation, partly for political reasons and partly because he is interested in Georg's lover, the actress Christa-Maria Sieland.

"Investigation" means spying. The job of bugging Dreyman's apartment falls to Captain Wiesler, a fervent loyalist who even teaches in the Stasi academy. He now spends hours in the attic above Dreyman's apartment listening to the quarrels and passions of the lovers and their conversations with friends. It becomes clear to him quite early that Georg and Christa-Maria are not happy with the GDR government, but he keeps listening.

There are hints of *Tosca* in the way that Christa-Maria accedes to Minister Hempf when she learns of his concerns about her lover. But the crux of the film is not with them but with Captain Wiesler, especially with the effect that

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the monitoring has on the monitor. If he doesn't actually fall in love with Christa-Maria, he becomes empathetic, sensitized to her danger, which is a new experience for a man who (as we have seen) has conducted many of the interrogations we heard about in the other film.

It would be unjust to unravel the events that unwind in the climax—and in the postlude that constitutes a kind of quieter climax. But the picture tells us that people who spend their lives concentrating on the lives of others are not always immune to contact with others' lives. If this is weakness in a secret service, in this case we can't quite suppress a grunt of satisfaction. Obviously, in the world as it is, all of us need protection whether we like it or not. The spies are here to stay—and increase. But some perversity in us keeps hoping that they are not all robots.

The cast of this film stokes that perversity. Sebastian Koch, as Georg, has the sort of good looks that bespeak an interesting man. Martina Gedeck, as Christa-Maria, is lovely and, in all shades, compelling. Ulrich Mühe makes Wiesler the kind of rigidly strict, thoroughly convinced officer who shows no hint of breach and therefore makes us suspect the possibility. Thomas Thieme, as Minister Hempf, provides lechery coaxed along by power. Thus, despite the fact that parts of this film remind us of past pictures with comparable themes, the director and his actors make it immediate, gripping. ■

Sarah Williams Goldhagen on Architecture

Project Runway

For assessing architectural exhibitions, the following formula typically applies: if the show looks good, then it proffers few insights into architecture. If it appears to be disorderly, indecipherable, or clotted with dense expository wall texts of the sort that critics believe museumgoers dislike, then it may offer insights into the buildings or projects it displays, but most people will not stay long enough to find out.

SKIN + BONES: PARALLEL PRACTICES IN FASHION AND ARCHITECTURE
(Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art)

To see paintings, you need to look at the paintings. That is done standing in front of them. To see buildings, you need to look at buildings. That is done by traveling to those buildings, looking at them, walking around them, and exploring them inside and out. Compared to looking at artworks, looking at buildings is more physically demanding, more time-consuming, and more expensive—a retrospective of Le Corbusier or Renzo Piano, or most any other major architect of the twentieth century, would take you to many cities in many countries on several continents.

Not least for this practical reason, it is far more difficult for non-professionals to accumulate the knowledge about buildings necessary to understand contemporary architecture. Aside from major publicity-attracting developments such as Ground Zero in New York City or Grand Avenue in Los Angeles, there exists a smaller public audience for architecture than for art; less public discourse about architecture than about art; fewer well-placed patrons and advocates for architecture than for art; and a largely ignorant public making what are often ill-informed judgments about architecture. This, even though architecture, more than painting, sculpture, photography, installations, or "new media" art, has a substantially greater impact on our public realm, our communities, our lives.

For this and other reasons, more and more museums are now interested in the phenomenon of the architectural exhibition. Curators, excited by great architecture past and present, endeavor to bring what they can of buildings to people, perhaps with the hope of eventually getting people to buildings, or conveying to viewers enough about the buildings

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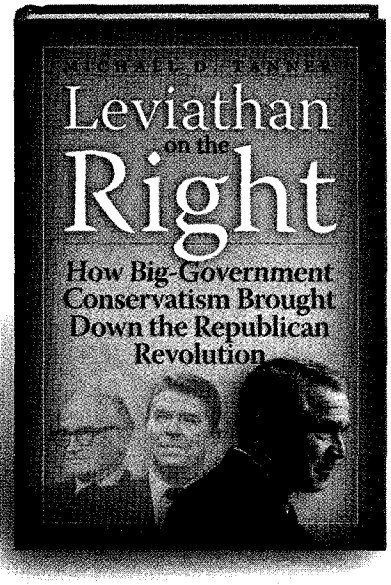

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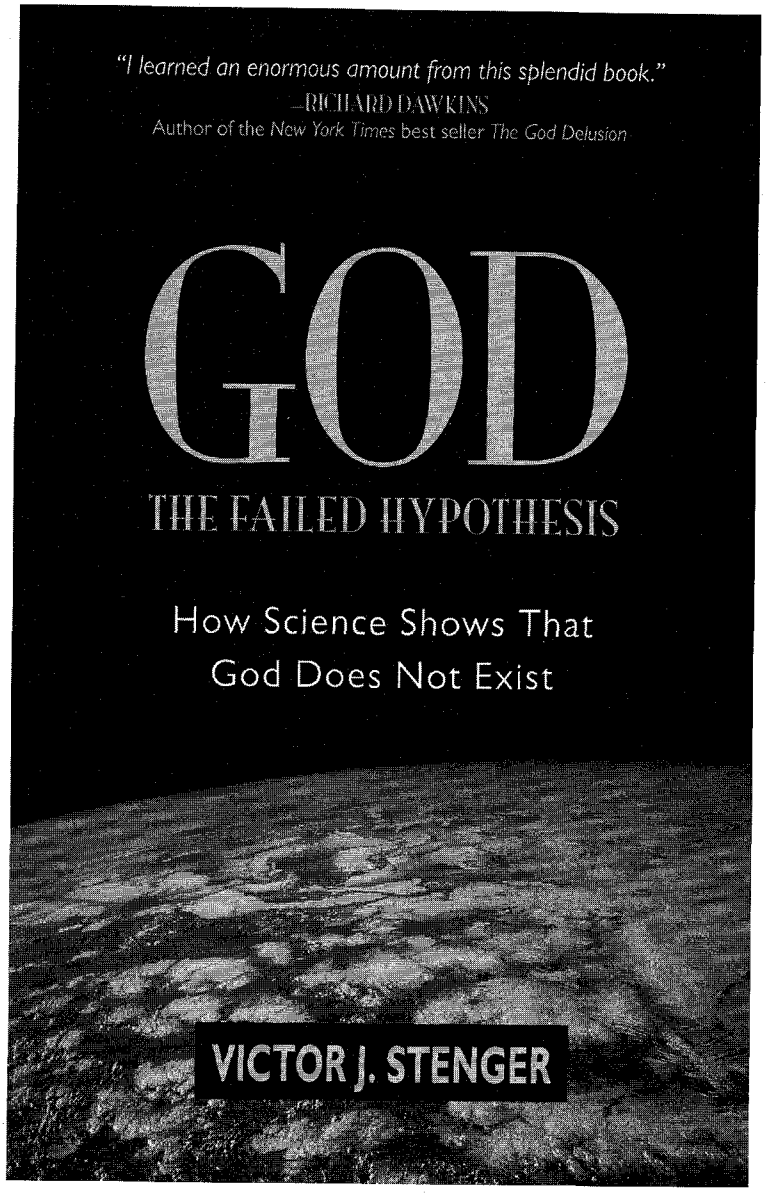
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so that they will seek them or others out and, more broadly, support architecture. But the architectural exhibition, unlike its artistic analogue, displays not the artwork itself but a representation of that work—or, rather, multiple representations of it, all of them partial and pathetically inadequate. As any former architecture client will tell you, one cannot comprehend even a relatively simple building without talking at length to the architect while studying many models, plans, sections, drawings, more drawings, photographs, even mock-ups of details. And even all that pales in comparison with beholding and moving through the building itself. Enabling the museum-goer to decipher the surfeit of visual material sufficient to present even a single building also necessitates words—words describing the building's program; words explaining its site's topographic contours and climatological conditions; words detailing its physical context, whether it be urban, suburban, or exurban; and, for all but the most initiated viewers, words elucidating the architect's particular approach to the particular challenge of this design.

How many non-specialists know how to read a section—or even know what one is? Even if the ordinary museum-goer were able to assimilate, make sense of, and synthesize all this visual and verbal material, few try. This is not the case with an art exhibition. One does not enter a show of paintings expecting to emerge purblind. So how to exhibit architecture in a gallery or museum setting? Oh, have people tried. I once saw an exhibition of the work of a young architect who, in what I suppose was an effort to exaggerate the artificiality of task, fabricated small-scale models of interior views of his various projects and encased them in unadorned plywood boxes poked with a single pinhole. The boxes were suspended from gallery walls near waist level, so that entering the show felt like stumbling upon some amateurish parody of sculptures by Donald Judd. In order to see the actual work on display, you needed to crouch into body-unfriendly positions to peer inside each box.

Another attempt, more successful, dates from 1998, when New York's Museum of Modern Art teamed up with San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art to commission installations from then emerging, now well-established firms such as Office dA and Kennedy & Vio-

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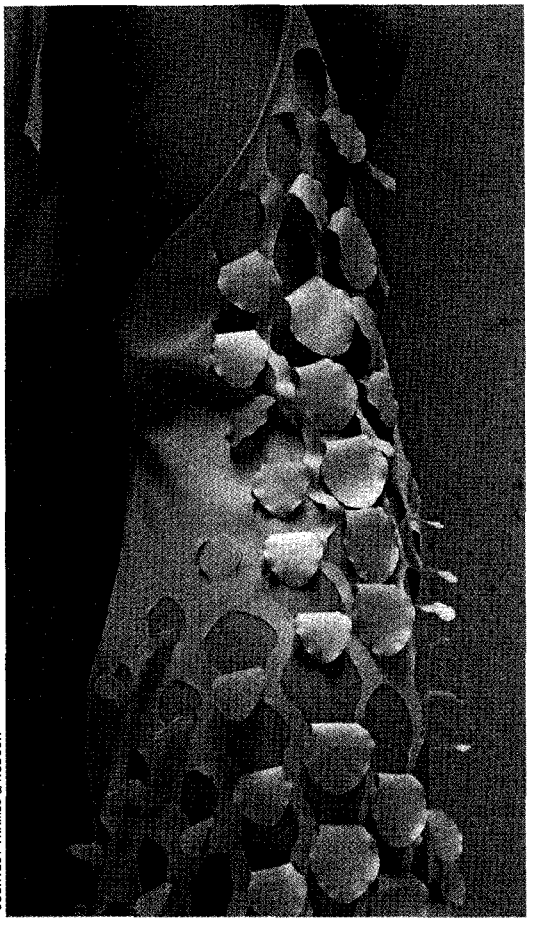
lich of Boston, Smith-Miller + Hawkinson of New York, and Patkau Architects of Vancouver. The two-venue exhibition displayed innovative, large-scale installations that conveyed a slice of each firms' material and intellectual explorations without misleading museum visitors into the impression that what they beheld was actually architecture. But far more common are the less expensive, less imaginative, and less successful approaches: blown-up magazine-quality photographs of a building and its details; noncontextual computer-generated renderings or computer-animated "flythroughs"; models offering viewers a bird's-eye perspective of the project that a viewer would likely never see standing on the ground.

"Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture," organized by Brooke Hodge of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MoCA) and installed, very tastefully, by the New York firm Tsao & McKown, skirts all these problems. The show finesses architecture's intrinsic recalcitrance in the gallery setting by making no pretense of offering an understanding of any individual project or building. Instead, the exhibition isolates a number of specific formal practices that are used, or so it is proposed, by both contemporary architects and fashion designers. This is architecture as haute couture. (The clothes look like couture even when they are "ready-to-wear.") At MoCA, architecture's and fashion's "parallel practices" purportedly include exploring the relationship of structure (bones) to envelope (skin); the bending, folding, wrapping, and pleating of surfaces; the deployment of geometries—conventional, distorted, or both—to create forms; the transformation of usually hidden constructive elements into major features of the design; and the use of new products and materials and of new fabrication processes, many of which have been facilitated by recent digital technologies.

"Skin + Bones" is a lovely show. A looping sequence of galleries display spotlit, depressingly small-waisted mannequins draped in ridiculously beautiful and sometimes amusing clothing. One fashion "piece," by Viktor & Rolf, displays a group of mannequins evenly spaced along the perimeter of a circular pedestal, faceless faces outward. The first mannequin you see upon entering the room is clad in burlap-quality sackcloth. The others are successively dressed in bejeweled and ornate robes until the last, bulkily wrapped mannequin, next to the first, displays a lavishly designed, tightly woven sackcloth gown adorned with a single sackcloth rose. Another piece, by Hussein Chalayan, begins as a circular coffee table. A video clip projected on the wall behind the table shows a runway model stepping into its center, stooping down to latch it to her top, and rising as the table's rings fall in concentrically expanding hoops. Presto! A stepped conical pyramid of a skirt.



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ELENA MANFERDINI, *Petal Dress from Clad Cuts Collection*, Spring/Summer 2005

Intuiting the complex intellectual demands placed upon the viewer when exhibiting a building, the installers wisely back-loaded "Skin + Bones" with the architecture. One enjoys several rooms of *Vogue*-ish settings before being called upon to think about buildings. As for the architecture, documentation is sparse. A few large-scale photographs, perhaps a model (not the leggy emaciated kind), in rare instances a plan. But the information adequate for the viewer to understand any single building is nowhere to be found. Paired with the clothes, the architectural projects flashed here advance a provocative and convincing case that in both avant-garde fashion and architecture, "parallel practices" abound. One sees a blobby skirt (Junya Wantanabe) and a blobby wall (Greg Lynn). A pleated jacket (Issey Miyake) and a pleated steel and glass façade (Winka Dubbeldam). A contortedly geometric evening gown (Yeohlee Teng) and an intricately twisted museum lightwell composed from distorted geometries (Preston Scott Cohen). A boldly patterned print evening coat (Dries van Noten) and a boldly patterned rooftop (Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue). A dress (J. Meejin Yoon) and a house (Foreign Office Architects) both based on the complex geometric figure of the Möbius strip.

"Skin + Bones" makes a certain kind of surface sense. Critics have correctly taken issue with Hodge's decision to highlight the Museum of Modern Art's "Deconstructivist Architecture" exhibition of 1988, because much of the architecture exhibited in the "Construction/Deconstruction" section looks utterly unlike the clothing with which it is coupled. That is but a quibble. The show leaves you wanting to see more. One wants to crumple up paper just like Frank Gehry does, to loop pink and gold-lamé ribbons into fabric just like Ralph Rucci does. One wants to shop. For the purpose of visual and sensory titillation and skin-deep intellectual inquiry, Hodge's unlikely pairing of architecture and fashion is candy for the eyes.

But candy offers little sustenance. When it comes to the merits of the show's premises, the quality of the work it exhibits, and the exhibition's likely impact on the public and the profession (or, in this case, professions), "Skin + Bones" is muddleheaded and disheartening. What exactly is being suggested here? That contemporary fashion designers

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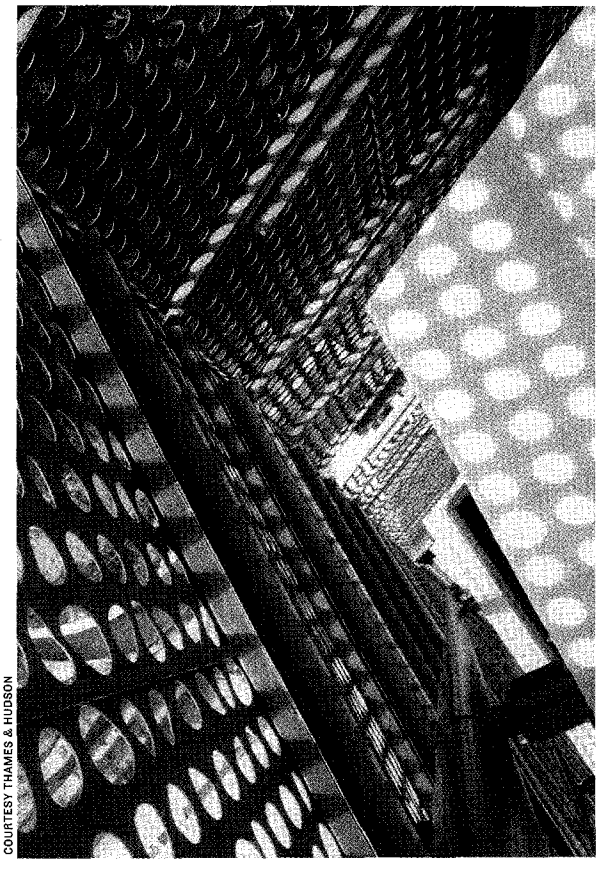
take inspiration from architects? That contemporary architects take inspiration from fashion designers? That some sort of zeitgeist is driving both professions to "parallel practices"? The show's thinking is cloudy, and the otherwise earnest essays in the catalogue do not disperse the fog. Viewers are left to discern the show's meanings on their own.

The first possibility—that contemporary fashion designers are taking cues from architects—is certainly plausible and, according to Hodge, in some instances verifiably the case. Dresses from Narciso Rodriguez's 2005–2006 collection, in which a garment's structuring elements (zippers, pleats, and seams) are meticulously brandished, are paired with Frank Gehry's famous renovations to his own house, now thirty years old, in which a polygonal glass volume with exposed wood joists crashes into the kitchen of a perfectly ordinary Santa Monica colonial. But if Rodriguez and other contemporary fashion designers are learning from architects, why should we care? Yves Saint Laurent's "Mondrian" dress of 1965 is only the most famous example of how fashion designers, always under pressure to come up with the next new thing, forage opportunistically through the talismans of culture and society. And since the next new thing will quickly be supplanted by the *next* next new thing, it doesn't really matter whether any single idea or collection captures the essence of anything.

The second possibility—that architects are drawing inspiration from contemporary fashion, and are indeed deeply immersed in the world of fashion design—is also correct. This goes far beyond Jacques Herzog's recent line of "shit-smelling" perfume, or Toshiko Mori's nomination to *The Boston Globe*'s "Stylish 25" list; it includes the growing enmeshment of architects with fashion designers, as the latter have taken to employing brand-name architects to design their signature buildings, as in John Pawson's Calvin Klein store on Madison Avenue; Rem Koolhaas's and Herzog and de Meuron's Prada "epicenters," respectively in New York and Tokyo; and Toyo Ito's building for Tod's, also in Tokyo. Accessorizing to this trend is a strain of contemporary architecture that is smitten, often fatally, with chic.



COURTESY THAMES & HUDSON

HERZOG & DE MEURON, *De Young Museum*, 1999–2005

ALL THE FASHION PROJECTS mentioned here look to be wonderful, owing perhaps to lavish budgets and visually inclined patrons. (I haven't seen the buildings in Tokyo.) So bedding fashion down with architecture reaps some artistic fruit. But not without incurring a serious cost. The likely impact of "Skin + Bones" on architectural practice is that it will nurture the ever more densely populated cadre of architects who believe, in the words of Caroline Bos of the trendy UN Studio, that "the architect is going to be the fashion designer of the future ... speculating, anticipating, holding a mirror to the world." These practitioners believe that because they, and only they, understand the next best thing, they and their architecture, like these fashion designers and their clothes, are some sort of avant-garde, ahead of the curve, ineffably cool. They insist, preferably with fireworks on the screen behind them, that they and only they discern the social and cultural conditions of the contemporary world; and so they, and only they, make the architecture that suits that world.

The ever more media-savvy architectural *fashionistas*, only some of whom are represented here, are pernicious for several reasons. Most obvious is that fashion is, well, just fashion. Its transience invites playfulness and irony. But buildings, unlike dresses, last for generations. After fifty years, when much moment-specific cultural knowledge will have evaporated, who will get those inside jokes? A building cannot be stored away in the cedar closet like some Comme des Garçons dress. It needs to mean something, and to accommodate not only its clients but their children's grandchildren. And so even if much high-end architecture is enslaved to fashion, that coupling is nothing to celebrate.

More disturbingly, "Skin + Bones" rewards those architects who focus overwhelmingly, sometimes even exclusively, on form. Thought-provoking buildings of aesthetic density are what all clients should seek. Architecture, however, does not just function as a mirror to society, it also shapes that society. An exclusively formalist approach fails to ask some of architecture's most important questions. What kind of social role can and should an institution play in the life of a place? How might a building shape its users' movements through and experience of its spaces and its views, inside and out? What about sustainability? What about site conditions? How will the building or project work with the rest of the city? For the formalist, such considerations are either beyond the province of contemporary practice or they are simply boring. Torquing or colliding geometries is much less bothersome, and much more fun.

And if "Skin + Bones" proposes that both professions are drawing inspiration from some sort of cultural zeitgeist, then the themes conceptualized to organize the show—Identity, Shelter, Geometry, Creative Process, Structural Skin, Constructing Volume, Construction/Deconstruction, Tectonic Strategies, Effect and Ephemerality—are too vague and too heterogeneous to indicate what

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this spirit of the age might be, or even whether there is one. Martin Margiela's "deconstructionist" cutting and stitching together of fabrics of various textures and patterns into single dresses in the 1990s might be profitably compared to some of the projects in MoMA's "Deconstructivist Architecture" exhibition in 1988; perhaps both do indicate a cultural preoccupation with disjuncture and irresolvable contradictions. Yet other such pairings fail to suggest a zeitgeist from which these disparate disciplinary practices draw. Haven't both fashion designers and architects always been interested in pattern, and in geometry? (Just look at the façade of St. Peter's in Rome.) Aren't there dozens of examples of modern architects creating structural skins, Minoru Yamasaki's World Trade Center towers being the most famous example? And what about "Constructing Volume"? Isn't that what any architect by definition does?

"SKIN + BONES" TOO OFTEN conflates the good with the bad and the ill-advised. Flashes of superb buildings, which beautifully integrate structure, form, program, and materials, such as Toyo Ito's Tod's and Sendai Mediatheque in Tokyo and Rem Koolhaas's Seattle Public Library, are side by side with projects that are just plain silly or bad. Zaha Hadid's widely celebrated Vitra Fire Station, in Weil-am-Rhein, Germany, proved so useless for its intended function that the client, in an act of desperation, transformed it into an arm of the Vitra Design Museum. The fire station's interiors now look more like those dusty "study collections" museum curators pack into disused corridors. (Coincidentally, the day I visited, no one was inside and a fashion shoot was in process with the building as a backdrop.) Diller Scofidio + Renfro's recently opened Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston looks fantastic from the Boston harbor and from the computer-generated stills of it exhibited in "Skin + Bones." Given how conservative the architectural community is in Boston, it is an important accomplishment. Yet the actual building's entry sequence, the non-existent relationship of its structural theatrics to the shape of its interior spaces, its detailing, its spatial processions, and even its top-lit galleries are simply, grievously, awful. Making a dress out of the geometrically complex Möbius strip is fun (J. Meejin Yoon); designing a house out of one (Foreign Office Architects; UN studio also built one) is stupid.

Inside the sprawling, glittering disaster that is "Skin + Bones" is an important exhibition waiting to be curated. That exhibition would explicitly investigate what "Skin + Bones" does only implicitly: namely, that in the past two decades contemporary architectural practices have been greatly changed by the advent of a new generation of synthetic and recycled materials, by new products such as light-emitting diodes (LED) and fiber optics, and by digital technologies such as computer-aided design (CAD), computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), robotic cutting machines (CNC routers), and computer-controlled three-dimensional modeling. These and other new technologies have inspired designers to focus on how they can manipulate a building's surfaces—skins—in unusual and often extremely complex ways. (They also underlie the current resurgence of interest in prefabricated housing, as practitioners feel their way toward the architectural equivalent of "mass customized" blue jeans.) A great deal of the pleating, folding, bending, curving, and colliding surfaces that render some contemporary architectural practices visually reminiscent of clothing design relies on the advent of these new technologies.

The fascination among some contemporary architects with surface (less frequently, and more interestingly, with structural surface) and the new technologies that are driving that fascination are certainly worth a museum's attention. Such an exhibition would demonstrate these technologies to the uninitiated and would explore how architects are using and could use them. In an ideal world, such an exhibition would conduct this exploration dispassionately, critically. Is CAD simply a better kind of pencil? Will CAD and CAM revolutionize architecture as steel and reinforced concrete once did? Are these and other technologies ushering in a new age of forms, space, or modes of use? Does a new age of forms constitute a new age of architecture? Or are these new materials and new technologies simply new toys, enticing architects to make blobby, folded, or jagged buildings just because they now can? Eventually, such a show may come to a museum or a gallery near you. When it does, will you go to it? And if you do, how long will you stay? ■

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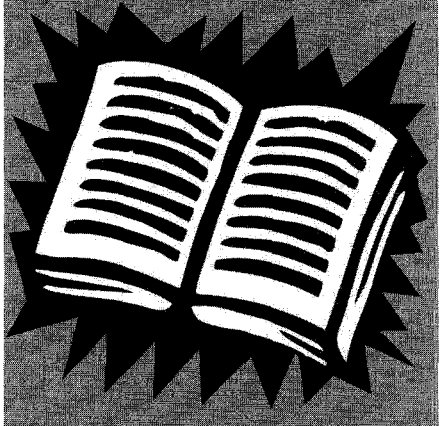

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Ruth Franklin

The Prisoner of Sex

THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST
By Norman Mailer
(Random House, 477 pp., $27.95)

THE READER STRONG-stomached enough to make it to the end of Norman Mailer's new novel, which comprises nearly five hundred of the most revolting pages in recent American fiction, will discover a refreshing oasis of reason. This oasis is a bibliography of more than a hundred assiduously chosen books, many of them mainstays of the scholarship and literature of Nazi Germany: Ian Kershaw's two-volume biography of Hitler; the works of Hugh Trevor-Roper, Joachim Fest, Ernst Nolte, and George Mosse; even *Dr. Faustus*. A note from Mailer solemnly informs us that certain titles, marked with an asterisk, "did provide me ... with a bounty of factual and chronological references that a novel in this form can never ignore."

So what breakthroughs in understanding were made possible by these efforts in erudition? Here is an example. At one point in the novel, Alois Hitler, father of Adolf, indulges in a reverie on his favorite subject.

> The female organ! ... Such a wonderful array of meats and juices—such a panoply of flesh in miniature—this offering of archways and caverns and lips. Alois was certainly no philosopher, so he would not have known how to speak of Becoming (that state of existence when Being suddenly feels itself out in the open), but all the same, he could have given a tip to Heidegger. Becoming is, yes, exactly, when a woman opens her legs!

And indeed two books by Heidegger appear on Mailer's reading list, one dutifully asterisked.

Mailer accomplishes something here that I didn't think was possible: he makes one feel a twinge of sympathy for Heidegger. But the reader who is familiar with more than a few of the books on Mailer's syllabus—who may already know something about Germany and the Holocaust, and may have already pondered the problem of the Nazi who shoots Jews during the day and retires to Beethoven quartets at night—will face a new question about the relationship between culture and corruption. How could a writer as intelligent and original as Norman Mailer have digested this library of books and returned with the superficial, twisted, and finally just plain stupid vision of Hitler in this novel?

The Castle in the Forest has already become somewhat notorious for the bizarre conceit that organizes it: the book is the story of Adolf Hitler's childhood as narrated by a devil. Not Satan himself, but one of his minions, who has been charged with keeping watch over the young Hitler. With this device, Mailer promises an answer to what he calls "the first obsession": how to understand the character of Hitler. "I know him top to bottom," this narrator confidently tells us. "To borrow from the Americans, given their rough grasp of vulgarity, I am prepared to say: 'Yes, I know him from asshole to appetite.'" This phrase, which becomes one of the books oft-repeated leitmotifs—the other one, similarly excretory in nature, I will get to in a moment—certainly makes good on its promise. We learn a lot about Hitler's asshole, and we learn a little about his appetites.

But we learn almost nothing about his mind, his heart, even—dare I say—his soul. This is a staggering failure. For if the struggle between good and evil is not a struggle for men's souls, then what is it? Well, for Mailer it appears to be something like an eternal peep show. His devils spend the majority of their time in the bedroom, where they vicariously take part in sex acts: "Fucking—to employ that most useful, all-but-cosmopolitan, and near-onomatopoeic word, so close to the meats [again!], body slaps, and fats of the occasion—is of real interest." Even from Mailer, who once wrote that the "sexual force" of a man is "his finest moral product," this intensity of obsession is incomprehensible.

THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST is not a novel about Hitler, it is a novel about sex. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of sex—more precisely, of a certain notion of sex—to this book. It is certainly the most semen-soaked "major" novel I have ever read. Page after page after page (though the book is not as long as it appears to be, because it is printed in remedial type—even the font is bloated!) is devoted to the detailed description of a staggering variety of sex acts. There is sex between a teenage boy and his three half-sisters (not, thankfully, at the same time), between a young man and every cook and chambermaid unfortunate enough to cross his path, between an elderly man and an adolescent boy, between a father and his daughter.

The man responsible for the majority of this is Alois Hitler, who is the novel's real protagonist, and in many ways its true monster: a man whose sexual appetites bow to no convention, social or moral. *The Castle in the Forest* starts with Alois's own conception—he is the illegitimate child of the maid Maria Anna Schicklgruber and her cousin Johann Nepomuk Hiedler (to be later spelled Hitler)—and chronicles the rise of his career to "the highest level of the middle ranks" in the customs service and his marriage to Klara Poelzl, Adolf's mother; it ends just after his death. The narrator explains that he began his investigation into Alois's background at the instigation of Himmler, who was secretly obsessed with the idea that the children resulting from incest are the most likely to be exceptional, since "the best human possibilities lie close to the worst." He concludes, through a series of speculations too tiresome to be rehearsed here, that Alois and Klara are not only uncle and niece (as they acknowledge), but in fact father and daughter, since Klara is the result of Alois's coupling—part of a "tradition of apocalyptic intercourse in barn straw"—with one of his half-sisters. (Lest anyone wonder whether the woman involved could be certain of Alois's paternity, Mailer has endowed every female in this novel with the psychic power of recognizing the moment she has been impregnated.) For Himmler, who hypothesizes that "any Superman who embodies the Vision is bound to come forth from a mating of exceptionally similar genetic ingredients," this is confirmation beyond his wildest dreams.

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But what is its significance for the average, even innocent reader, who comes to this book hoping for a renowned novelist's insight into Hitler's character and is met with this twisted family tree? Well, she will have to content herself with the *ab diabolo* explanation for Hitler's evil. Mailer's devil, when he is not observing or orchestrating or wondering about sex, spends a fair amount of energy describing the wars between the angels and the devils—which, he reports, Milton got largely right, but not quite. Unfortunately, the blueprint of the Underworld that we are given here is so unimaginative and asinine that it would embarrass Stephen King. Satan is "the Maestro"; God is known as "the D.K.," short for *Dummkopf*; guardian angels are "Cudgels." Individual devils are assigned to keep track of various humans (like lawyers or brokers, they call their charges "clients"), of which they may have any number at one time—midway through the novel, the narrator abandons young Adolf to file a report on the coronation of Czar Nicholas II and the tragic stampede at Khodynka Field, in which he played a role. This episode is puzzling for many reasons, not the least of which is that we are offered a comprehensive account of the czar and czarina's sex life—of course!—but not a word on the whereabouts of young Stalin, who would certainly have been as interesting to any real devil as Hitler.

Devils can recover people's memories, etch dreams into their minds, and inhabit their bodies, and they always know what time it is. But like the rest of us, they have limited time at their disposal, and so the multi-tasking fiends must carefully calculate which humans are not worth their attention and which "are ready to transgress a few large laws—whether social or divine." Devils can even suffer injuries. At one point a Cudgel throws our narrator down a flight of stairs: "Since I was not corporeal at the time, there was no flesh to bruise but, oh, what a pummeling to my inner presence!" The angels whistling through Wim Wenders's Berlin would have made mincemeat of this guy.

MAILER'S NARRATOR IS THE downfall of this Hindenburgian book. In his last novel, *The Gospel According to the Son*, Mailer told the story of Jesus in the first person, a hubristic but also invigorating approach to a story long since examined from every possible angle. *The Castle in the Forest* must be seen as some kind of companion piece to *Gospel*—Mailer said in a recent interview that "there have been two exceptional births in human history: Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler"—and even after all this, the thought of what Mailer might have done with Hitler's story, told in his own words, is intriguing. Instead, the young Adolf, or "Adi," as his mother calls him, remains a mystery. We see him being manipulated by his own personal devil, but we are allowed very little insight into his thoughts.

What we get is a series of set-pieces, all of which gesture toward Hitler's menace without elucidating it. The infant Adi is cosseted by his mother, who indulgently breastfeeds him and cleans his "pip-squeak of an anus" until it is "as immaculate as an opal, small and glistening." Even as a child, he has terrible body odor, a sign that he is one of the devil's clients. (Our narrator dutifully explains that God instigated the method of marking humans by scent for his own purposes, but by later in the twentieth century the devils will have managed to subvert it through the introduction of rigorous personal hygiene.) At age five, he becomes the master of war games at school, piquing the Maestro's interest further. His father takes up beekeeping, and when one hive must be gassed and another burned, Adi, who is now six, takes a sadistic, almost sexual pleasure in the acts. (Get it?) Trees are a particular fixation: when he is not masturbating onto leaves, Adi roars at the trees in the forest to develop his vocal chords. Later he meets a blacksmith who inspires him to ask, "What is a will of iron? How is that made?" All the while, the narrator cautions us against reading too deeply into any of these episodes. "I would warn the reader not to make too much of" the gassing of the bees, he cautions at one point: "It is not to be understood as the unique cause of all that came later." Well, fine. Nothing has a "unique cause." But if these early exercises in sadism are not to be understood as indications of what comes later, then what is their point?

Though the narrator claimed at the outset to understand Hitler from the inside out, in fact he takes no serious

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Fifty Years Since Roth v. United States

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

by Daniel Mark Cohen

If the people of the United States collectively endorse a single prayer, one that, universal in its reach, transcends the necessary differences in faith and ethnicity that otherwise divide the nation, that prayer consists of three simple words:

God bless America.

But why should God bless America when her people, in ever increasing numbers, (now easily counted in the tens of millions), participate in an unacknowledged culture of prostitution, manifest most visibly in their mass patronage of Internet and cable-television pornography? (For what is pornography, after all, but prostitution mediated by photographic cameras?)

And why should God bless America when, as a consequence, she insists on the free, unregulated distribution via the Internet of the most vile sexual images so that, hourly, such pictures reach and indelibly corrupt the otherwise innocent eyes and chaste minds of the country's millions of unsupervised children?

God bless America?

No.

"Words without thoughts never to heaven go."
-Shakespeare

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interest in his prize charge. He is able to view humanity only through a single, split lens: on the one side, sex; on the other side, shit. Augustine's famous lament (here inexplicably attributed to St. Odon of Cluny) *inter faeces et urinam nascimur*—"between shit and piss are we born," in Mailer's translation—is approvingly cited at least three times by both the narrator and then Hitler himself, who hears it from a fellow student and is inspired to use his diploma in lieu of a toilet. For the narrator, it is the key to the two primary human relationships, marriage and parenthood. Mostly the former, actually: "The proper study of marriage resides not only in partnership, congeniality, affection, boredom, predictable habit, daily annoyance, verbal scuffles, and daily despair, but in the guts and smear of it all—the comradely knowledge of all the forbidden tastes, smells, and bodily nooks. Indeed, if all of that were absent, the sacrament would have less foundation. On caca, is marriage based. So I would assert." Why? No explanation is given, other than a formulation of the daily squabbles between husbands and wives as "excrementitious exchanges." (*The Castle*, by Franz Kaka.)

The narrator says that he is trying to write like "a conventional novelist of the old school," inhabiting the minds and speaking the thoughts of his characters: "I delight in writing about these people like any good novelist, and so am ready by turns to observe them sardonically, objectively, ironically, sympathetically, judgmentally, even compassionately." But he can approach them only through his own puerile perspective. He compares the death of three thousand peasants at Khodynka Field to the "unpleasantness" of someone farting at a banquet. Not incidentally, he is a terrible writer. He reports of the czarina that "Alix was more than pregnant. Her belly was huge." (More than pregnant?) His narrative has something of the mannered style of *The Gospel According to the Son*, though the mannerisms here are pseudo-Germanic rather than pseudo–archaic English. Perhaps the book's stilted dialogue is meant to imitate the convolutions of German syntax, but even Germans do not talk this way. ("How do you know this, Alois? So much you know," Klara simpers to her husband, sounding like someone out of *Young Frankenstein*.)

The sex scenes transgress the boundaries of taste, of course: that has always been Mailer's game. But they are not just depraved, they are also ludicrous—the vaporizings of an incompetent pornographer:

> Klara turned head to foot, and put her most unmentionable part down on his hard-breathing nose and mouth, and took his old battering ram into her lips. [Into her lips?] Uncle was now as soft as a coil of excrement. She sucked on him nonetheless with an avidity that could come only from the Evil One—that she knew. From there, the impulse had come. So now they both had their heads at the wrong end, and the Evil One was there. He had never been so close before.
>
> The Hound began to come to life. Right in her mouth. It surprised her. Alois had been so limp. But now he was a man again! His mouth lathered with her sap, he turned around and embraced her face [embraced her face?] with all the passion of his own lips and face, ready at last to grind into her with the Hound, drive it into her piety, yes, damn all piety, thought Alois—damned church-mouse wife, damned church!—he was back from the dead—some kind of miracle, he was all there, his pride equal to a sword. This was better than a storm at sea!

The narrator is an undeniably repugnant character, though even his repugnance has none of the irresistible charisma of literature's great devils, Milton's and Goethe's and Mann's. Given the book's narrative strategy, one wants to read it as an attempt at exemplifying a vision of humanity that is absolutely, ultimately, irredeemably evil: after all, these numbingly repetitive sex scenes can hardly qualify as man's "finest moral product." Yet even the most unreliable narrator gives us hints to his own unreliability; we know that he is unreliable because we can compare what he says to what we know about the real world, and see at a glance how he has gotten it wrong. For an unreliable narrator to be effective, he needs a strong authorial presence behind him, who simultaneously nudges him away from reality and nudges us toward it. Such a presence is entirely lacking in this novel, which exists solely in the dual hells of the universe of devils and the Hitlers' household. Klara, who seems to be intended as a sort of embodiment of the good, is a voiceless cipher, occasionally succumbing to moral outrage over her husband's conduct, but never able to assert herself in the face of it.

A LITTLE IN DESPERATION, THE reader looks back at Mailer's career for help in interpreting this brew of bodily excretions. What one finds, of course, is a writer who has not infrequently put forth a view of the universe—or at least the universe of male-female relations—that is strikingly similar to our devil's philosophy of sex and shit. Just a few years before he published *The Executioner's Song*, for example, Mailer put together an anthology of the writings of Henry Miller, whom he hailed, in numerous critical commentaries scattered throughout the volume, as the greatest American writer of the century. In contrast to Hemingway, whom Mailer denigrated as uptight, Miller "bounces in the stink. We read *Tropic of Cancer*, that book of horrors, and feel happy. It is because there is honor in the horror, and metaphor in the hideous.... Look, he was forever saying, you do not have to die of this crud. You can breathe it, eat it, suck it, fuck it, and still bounce up for the next day. There is something inestimable in us if we can stand the smell." *Inter faeces et urinam nascimur*: and the greatest twentieth-century American writer is one who celebrates the human condition, thus understood, rather than attempting to transcend it. And if this weren't enough, Mailer fatally remarks of Miller that he "pounds away on the subject" of sex as an expression of love (oh, that impossible ideal!) "like a giant phallus trying to enter a child's vagina—in the pounding is one simple question: How do you get in?"

Nearly fifty years ago, in *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer famously wrote that he wished to "attempt an entrance

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into the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm, and Time." In his finest writings, he handled these primordial human impulses with some sophistication and a measure of mental control, allowing them to invigorate his novels and essays without entirely overwhelming them. But there is no sign of this Mailer in *The Castle in the Forest*, no recognition that such primitivism is hardly the last word on humankind. Is it really the case that human life suffers from too much reason? After all the decades of inquiry into Hitler by writers and historians and philosophers and psychologists, this is what Mailer has come to propose: the devil made him do it! How is it that the writer who set out to change the consciousness of America, the grand old lion of literary New York, has ended up with the superstitious worldview of a Bavarian peasant? What is most vexing about such diabolical fatalism is that by foisting responsibility for man's evil onto an army of devils, Mailer effectively strips humanity of its moral agency, and thus of its ability ever to inhabit fully the deepest mysteries of the heart. If the last sixty years of meditation on Hitler's character have taught us anything, it is surely that the Nazis were neither gods nor demons, but finally all too human, and that is the most terrifying thing of all. ■

William Deresiewicz
Unhappy Endings

THOMAS HARDY
By Claire Tomalin
(Penguin Press, 486 pp., $35)

THOMAS HARDY'S LIFE COULD have made a novel: a poor provincial boy rises to unthinkable eminence by dint of talent and sheer hard work, overcoming every obstacle placed in his way. But people have stopped writing novels like that, and one of the reasons is Thomas Hardy. Hardy changed his life by changing the way novels were written, discarding their familiar patterns and their reflexive optimism. He is the father of some of English modernism's most radical discoveries, and the grandfather, through Faulkner, of much of what has mattered in global fiction since World War II. And then, well into his fifties and at the peak of his success, he gave up writing fiction altogether, launching the most improbable major career in English poetry. Divided between two genres, his career was also divided between two centuries, and fittingly so, since his work is everywhere marked by the transition from the Victorian to the modern age—from faith to skepticism, from prudery to frankness, from belief in progress to despair before an indifferent universe. Indeed, his imaginative power and his iron clarity were instrumental in bringing that transition about. Hardy belonged to the generation that grappled with the death of God before it had hardened into its own easy orthodoxy. The boy born into rural Dorset in the first years of Queen Victoria's reign is still in many ways more modern than we are.

Claire Tomalin's new biography gets in pretty much everything that matters about Hardy's story and does it with impressive economy, wit, and grace. Tomalin, the author of seven previous biographies, including lives of Jane Austen and Samuel Pepys, is building here on the work of Michael Millgate, the dean of Hardy studies. Millgate's biography, recently republished in a revised edition, will remain the scholarly standard; but Tomalin does so much so well precisely because she does not try to supplant Millgate, thus relieving herself of the obligation to be comprehensive. Millgate marches chronologically through the details of Hardy's life, whereas Tomalin permits herself to step back and appraise whole periods at once, giving a stronger sense of its larger movements. Her lifetime of work in the nineteenth century enables her to evoke conditions and contexts—what London smelled like, what its literary world felt like—with a swift hand. Her lifetime of writing biographies gives her the imaginative power to draw scenes colorfully and intuit motives convincingly. Details are cunningly chosen; important ancillary characters get mini-biographies of their own. Tomalin's style is simple, terse, and at times even grand, with flashes of humor and mordant wit. Her biography is poetry to Millgate's prose, but if Hardy's own poetry, as Pound said, was made possible by his prose, Tomalin's was made possible by Millgate's.

THE DOMINANT SOCIAL FACT OF the world into which Hardy was born was class, and it remained in many ways the dominant social fact of his entire life. In the Dorset of 1840, the year of his birth, the traditional structure of rural society was still largely intact. In Tomalin's words, this remote and backward county remained a place where "those who owned the land and those who worked it were hardly thought of as belonging to the same species." Hardy's family was poor, but they were not indigent, a distinction of enormous importance both to them and to him—as was every one of the infinitesimal gradations of the English class system, to everyone. Not long before Hardy's birth, a local boy, hanged for merely witnessing an act of political vandalism, had to have weights hung from his half-starved body to force his neck to break. But Hardy's father was a self-employed builder—a step above the laborers, a step below the farmers, a whole Jacob's ladder below the gentry.

Still, if the class system in Dorset remained largely untouched by modernity, it had begun to relax just enough to allow Hardy's formidably strong-willed mother to dream of a better life for her bright, sensitive, bookish son. It was she who insisted that he get an education. By sixteen, he was apprentice to an architect in the nearby town of Dorchester—and finding himself the target of a sermon back home in which the local vicar preached against the presumption of members of the lower orders who aspired to join the professions. It was a slight that Hardy never forgot, and he went on to make novel after novel out of the drama of thwarted ambition. The opportunity for self-improvement made Hardy's life possible, but the resistance that he encountered gave it its texture. His career, his art, his consciousness—all are unthinkable outside the context

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of an entrenched class system that had begun to give ground, but only an inch at a time.

As with many self-made men, the amount of effort that went into Hardy's self-creation is enough to make one weep. He never intended to become an architect; architecture was just a way to earn a living until he could pursue his true passion, poetry. His plan was to go to university, find a living as a parson, and write in his hours of leisure, as many clergymen did. But he as yet had nothing like the education, nor his father anything like the money, that would have made university possible. So he kept swotting away on his own, as Jude Fawley was to do in his last novel: at his books by 5 a.m. to get in three hours of reading before heading off on the long daily walk to Dorchester, adding Greek to his continuing study of Latin.

At twenty-one, Hardy went up to London to advance his architectural career, and it was around this time that he began the incredible labor—with no training, no encouragement, and no guide—of willing himself into existence as a poet. He worked from six to midnight every evening. He bought copies of Milton, Thomson, and Coleridge, an *Introduction to English Literature*, a *Standard Pronouncing Dictionary* (which says a lot about where he came from and how he felt about it), and a *Rhyming Dictionary*. He bought notebooks and filled them with vocabulary-building exercises, imitations, coinages, memoranda about specific literary effects, and pages and pages of quotations. He started jotting down notes about what he was seeing, reading, feeling, overhearing—ideas and images and phrases on which he would draw throughout his life. He also started writing poems such as this one, which gives a fair sample not only of his presumptive feelings at the time, but of the sardonic wit that would characterize much of his later verse:

> A senseless school, where we must
> give
> Our lives that we may learn to live!
> A dolt is he who memorizes
> Lessons that leave no time for prizes.

What he was not doing was publishing any of those poems, and by the time Hardy turned twenty-six he had given up on his dream of a university education followed by a lifetime of idle hours in the rectory—the recognition that probably precipitated the foregoing epigram. The next year he took ill, and when his old Dorchester boss wrote to offer him a job, he came back from London, after five years, with his tail between his legs. He had few prospects, little money, and virtually no connections in the literary world. But he did have one thing: the beginnings of a novel.

Where that novel came from is the biggest mystery of Hardy's literary career, beyond the fact that he was able to have one at all. Neither Millgate nor Tomalin is able to shed light on it, since the record of Hardy's life at the time is too scant to tell us when or why he decided to try his hand at fiction. One minute he is sweating over his verse and dabbling in literary journalism, the next he is launching himself into a novel whose 450-page first draft he would pour out in five months. The mystery is deepened by the fact that the novel was never published, and none of its manuscripts survive.

We do have a title, though, and it tells us quite a bit by itself. The book was called *The Poor Man and the Lady*. The situation thus named was to become Hardy's archetypal plot, the theme he would pursue for the bulk of his novelistic career, and it uncovers all too nakedly the extent to which his personality had been shaped by class. In both his art and his life, the lady was for Hardy what the *shiksa* was to be for Philip Roth (or for Alexander Portnoy): the nexus of sexual and social desire, the ideal figure who would symbolize and certify the outsider's acceptance. We also know from indirect evidence that the novel was a bitter satire against the upper classes, as if Hardy were unloading years of accumulated resentment toward the rejections and humiliations he had suffered.

Though the book was never published—mainly because it was so angry—it won Hardy just enough attention and encouragement to enable him to go on. Both Macmillan and Chapman & Hall turned it down, but Macmillan's reader pronounced the young writer full of "stuff and promise," and Chapman & Hall's—it was George Meredith—encouraged him to try something with a "purely artistic purpose" and a stronger plot. Hardy's response would set the pattern of his novelistic career. It is one of the many paradoxes that attend his life that Hardy, the most outspoken of English novelists, was the most malleable to the demands of the marketplace. Time and again he would acquiesce as editors insisted on bowdlerizing his sexual frankness or toning down his iconoclasm. He was willing to do so because his novels came out twice: first in serial form, only later as individual volumes. It was the magazine editors who saw to it that his novels contained nothing that could shock a young lady. In book form, Hardy would put back everything they had taken out, and end up shocking not only the young lady, but her parents as well.

He put up with this laborious procedure because he regarded fiction as, above all, a way to make a living. His novels were by no means devoid of aesthetic or philosophical ambition, but unlike his contemporary Henry James, who disdained Hardy's work (and who did not have to worry about making a living), Hardy treated novel-writing as a craft, not an art. He wrote quickly—his first nine books were published in the space of eleven years—and even his greatest novels, though great indeed, contain serious imperfections. At the outset of his career, with his aching need to succeed as a writer on any terms, he wrote whatever the editors wanted him to write, soaking up their suggestions as to how to appeal to the public's taste for excitement. As late as his fourth novel—it was *Far From the Madding Crowd*—he was hastening to assure an editor that he wished "merely to be considered a good hand at a serial." Earlier still, after the failure of *The Poor Man and the Lady*, his obeisance was even more urgent. The title of his first published work captures all too well both the commercial demands and the personal imperatives it was written to satisfy. It was called *Desperate Remedies*.

By the time he sold it, something equally momentous had happened: the poor man had met his lady. Hardy was still working as an architectural clerk when, a few months shy of his thirtieth birthday, he was sent to the remote north coast of Cornwall to make drawings for a planned church restoration. The rector was a gouty old man who lived with his young wife and her younger sister. The latter was genteel, graceful, and bold, with pink cheeks and a wealth of dark gold curls. She was twenty-six, and her

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friends called her "the peony." She could play the piano, paint watercolors, and sit a horse. She was the first lady to whom Hardy had ever spoken on equal terms, and the coast where she lived was wild and windswept. By the time he left, four days later, they were in love. Her name was Emma Gifford, and her father was a solicitor who had retired early to live off his mother's money and get spectacularly drunk. The money was nearly gone, which is why Emma was sharing a rectory with a sister and an old man in the middle of nowhere. But a lady she certainly was.

Hardy and Emma would go on to have one of the famously bad marriages of their time, but during the four years of their courtship she was invaluable to him, and they faced the world together. Both families were outraged at the idea of the match. For Hardy's intensely clannish mother, who preferred that her children not marry at all (a dictate obeyed by the other three), an impoverished gentlewoman was the worst possible choice. For Emma's parents, Hardy was literally unspeakable: they met him once and never talked to him again (which did not prevent some of their grandchildren from approaching him for help many years later). Emma stuck by him in part because she aspired to a literary life, to write herself and to be the wife of a writer, and it was her belief in his vocation and her willingness to make sacrifices (architecture would have provided a better living, at least at first, and made for a quicker marriage) that gave him the courage to go on while success still seemed so remote.

HARDY'S SECOND PUBLISHED novel, the lovely, idyllic *Under the Greenwood Tree*, should have set him on the course that led, only much later, to his greatest achievements. That it did not is part of the drama of the ambitious young provincial that played out in so much of Hardy's life. The book introduces most of the elements that would come to characterize the Wessex novels: a rural setting, rustic characters, the use of regional dialect, and the depiction of local customs and beliefs. Most importantly, it frames the stories of its individual characters within the larger context of a close-knit village community, and then frames the community itself in the still larger context of nature. Yet though the book was Hardy's first success, he resisted repeating it, establishing the tortuous course he would follow for his next seven novels.

When Hardy wrote about the rural life he knew so intimately, he produced his best and commercially most successful work, but he continued to insist on trying to prove that he could write about other things. He and Emma moved to London after their marriage, where he continued to make his way, contact by contact, into the capital's literary world. He had returned to London, as he had come the first time, to escape the limitations of his provincial upbringing, not to be shackled to it by getting himself labeled as a "regional" writer. So *Under the Greenwood Tree* was followed by *A Pair of Blue Eyes*; *Far From the Madding Crowd* by *The Hand of Ethelberta*; and *The Return of the Native* by *The Trumpet Major*, *A Laodicean*, and *Two on a Tower*, a trio of mediocrities about, respectively, the Napoleonic War, a millionaire's daughter, and an astronomer.

Hardy did not fully find his subject as a novelist until he had relocated himself in the territory of his youth. He and Emma left London after only a couple of years (to her permanent consternation, since the metropolitan social world was exactly what she wanted), but they continued to kick around among Dorset residences for nearly another decade, always keeping a wary distance from his mother. Finally Hardy purchased a plot of land scarcely two miles from the family cottage (where Hardys had lived for three generations) and designed and built the house he would call Max Gate. It is no accident that Max Gate rose during the very years Hardy wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the first novel of his artistic maturity. What Hardy had stumbled upon in his early successes and then run away from, he now returned to with a firmer if still complex sense of identity and a far grander artistic vision.

Although the term "Wessex," taken from the name of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom and designed to evoke an immemorial past, had first appeared in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, it was only in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* that it became a fully formed geographical and historical idea. *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure* soon followed. Hardy reclaimed the world of his youth by re-imagining it as his own private aesthetic realm, compounded of memory, feeling, and scrupulous observation, one that in his last four novels he would govern with potent, if troubled, artistic authority.

In so doing, he engendered not only Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, but also the dominant thrust of postwar fiction. And he brought to a culmination one of the major strains of nineteenth-century English fiction. Throughout the century, the English novel had differed from the French, the major continental tradition, by attending as much to provincial life as to life in the metropolis. England had Dickens, Thackeray, and Gaskell, but it also had Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot. In Eliot, who absorbed Wordsworth as fully as any poet, the attention to nature, and also to the full spectrum of provincial communities, from laborers to landowners, becomes acute. To this tradition Hardy brought not only an even greater fullness of representation, especially with regard to the village as opposed to the town, but also his most important contribution: a tragic sense of the countryside's gradual but inevitable disappearance.

Eliot registers many of the changes rural life had been experiencing under the impact of modernity's mental and material incursions, but Hardy documents its complete destruction. The difference was partly a matter of timing.

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Eliot's provincial novels, published between 1859 and 1872, concern events no later than about 1830. Hardy's, published from 1872 to 1895, take us all the way up to 1886. He begins with *Under the Greenwood Tree*, where the rural community seems suspended still in pastoral timelessness; he ends with *Jude the Obscure*, where it no longer exists at all: its relics destroyed, its kindness cold, its wisdom null, its legends a rumor, its denizens scattered to a world of railroads and bewilderment.

If Hardy's novels sounded the death knell of the rural community in the world's most advanced industrial nation, they also gave the birth cry of the new fiction that would arise in the twentieth century on the periphery of the modern world. Hardy showed that the novel, an indelibly modern genre, could be used to memorialize the traditional cultures that modernity was destroying. It could do so not just by recording traditional life, but also by taking into its written form the whole range of oral ones by which traditional life had always recorded itself: legend, superstition, ballad, folksong, pageant, dialect. And by bringing modern writing into contact with traditional speech, modern thought with traditional belief, the novel also inevitably reveals—as in Hardy's own often jarring philosophical asides and awkward jumps in linguistic register—the dilemma of the provincial (or colonial) artist or intellectual: caught between two worlds, trying to negotiate their commerce within both his society and his soul. These are the two main characteristics of the novel as it has arisen outside the West: the appropriation of traditional genres and the dramatization of the experience of contact with modernity. If Hardy became the model for Faulkner, Faulkner became the model for the literature of the developing world.

HARDY'S LAST NOVELS REPRESENT an enormous advance over his earlier ones in another respect: their uncompromising tragic vision. Beginning with *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy dispensed with the most hallowed convention in English fiction, the happy ending. He also became increasingly vocal in his rejection of Victorian sexual morality: the double standard that condemned single mothers but not their partners, the stigmatization of divorce that sentenced unhappy couples to a lifetime of misery. Hardy became unrelentingly frank about both life's physicality and its difficulty, and his late novels were consistently denounced as immoral and pessimistic. Those were related charges in Victorian England, whose chief faith was a belief in progress, whether its agent be a benevolent deity or a benevolent humanity. Hardy believed in neither.

Like his contemporary Nietzsche, he rejected God in any form and read Darwin with attention. The universe, for Hardy, was not even malevolent, it was simply indifferent, and the emergence of a species aware of its own suffering was a kind of grim evolutionary accident. We could do a little to make things better for one another—he wouldn't have railed against social injustice if he hadn't believed that—but the structure of human existence would remain ineluctably tragic, the tragedy devoid of meaning. This is an abyss not easily stared into, and it is only in the quarter-century before World War I—Conrad is the other conspicuous example among English novelists—that we find figures who were able to do it. Already in the years after 1914 we see artists taking refuge in alternative systems of meaning: Yeats's and Lawrence's historical mysticisms, Joyce's and Woolf's resurrection myths, T. S. Eliot's turn back to orthodoxy.

With their frankness and their pessimism, Hardy's late novels mark the beginning of modernism in English fiction. Conrad inherited his intimations of cosmic darkness, Lawrence and Joyce his willingness to expose the sexual dimensions of human experience. But what was the beginning for others was the end for him, though not for the reasons usually assigned. Received literary history tells us that Hardy gave up writing novels out of disgust at the outraged reaction provoked by *Jude the Obscure*, which may be the darkest and angriest novel ever written. Either that or because, having written such a novel, he had, aesthetically, no place left to go. But the reverse is true on both counts: Hardy had already decided to stop writing fiction, and he put everything he had long been feeling, including the class rage that hadn't seen written form since *The Poor Man and the Lady*, into what he knew would be his last novel.

The real reason he decided to give up fiction was rather different: it had made him rich. *The Woodlanders* had secured his reputation as England's pre-eminent novelist, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was a huge best-seller. With the passage of a new copyright law in the United States, Hardy knew he would be able to live off his royalties from then on. (A shrewd businessmen and frugal manager, he would leave an estate of nearly £100,000.) The plan he had launched twenty-eight years before had finally come to fruition. He could spend the rest of his life writing poetry.

HE WAS FIFTY-FIVE, AND HE could not have known that the rest of his life would last for thirty-three years. Since the Romantics, if not since Catullus, lyric poetry had been considered a young

This Corner of the Western World

Dark thing,
make a myth of yourself:

all women turn into lilacs,

all men grow sick of their errant scent.
You could learn

to build a window, to change flesh
into isinglass, nothing

but a brittle river, a love of bone.

You could snap like a branch—*No,*

this way, he says and the fence
releases the forest,

and every blue insect finds an inch of skin.
He loves low voices, diffidence

on the invented trail, the stones

you fuck him on. Yes
to sweat's souvenir, yes to his fist

in your hair, you bite

because you can. Silence
rides the back of your throat,

his tongue, your name.

JENNIFER CHANG

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man's art, requiring youth's fervor and immediacy of response. Although Hardy had never ceased making notes for and occasionally drafts of poems, his poetic career essentially began in late middle age. Nothing comparable has happened before or since.

Hardy, who had been a delicate child, had somehow managed to preserve both the physical energy and the emotional urgency of youth, and would continue to do so until the end of his life. He would go on to publish more than a thousand lyric poems, including some of the twentieth century's finest verse, in addition to a three-volume dramatic epic called *The Dynasts*. He was a master of diction and prosody, and his poetic output is remarkably diverse in both form and theme, comprising savage epigrams, charming nature studies, acutely felt topical verse, and typically unsparing meditations on human existence. Examples of the first include "Christmas: 1924," which gives the tenor of his religious views and marks the limits of his social meliorism:

> "Peace upon earth!" was said.
> We sing it,
> And pay a million priests to bring it.
> After two thousand years of mass
> We've got as far as poison-gas.

The simplicity and sweet music of his nature poetry are evident in "Weathers":

> This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
> And so do I;
> When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
> And nestlings fly:
> And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
> And they sit outside at "The Travelers' Rest,"
> And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
> And citizens dream of the south and west,
> And so do I.

In "Drummer Hodge," one of his best-known poems, Hardy registers the griefs of the Boer War, half a world away, by envisioning a simple soldier's alien grave:

> They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
> Uncoffined—just as found:
> His landmark is a kopje-crest
> That breaks the veldt around;
> And foreign constellations west
> Each night above his mound.

The rhythm is processional but unsentimental; the diction ("throw in," "breaks") persistently startling. In "During Wind and Rain," widely considered among his finest poems, Hardy compresses his tragic vision into a few lines whose jagged rhythms jar us with the work of time:

> They change to a high new house,
> He, she, all of them—aye,
> Clocks and carpets and chairs
> On the lawn all day,
> And brightest things that are theirs. . . .
> Ah, no; the years, the years;
> Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

But Hardy produced his greatest verse in response to Emma's death. The couple's relationship seems to have cooled even before their wedding, and the subsequent decades only deepened their estrangement. Emma was a vain and foolish woman who considered herself superior to her husband by birth and only slightly his inferior in literary talent. (In fact, she had no literary talent at all.) For his part, Hardy did to his wife what writers typically do, sacrificing marital intimacy to a single-minded devotion to his art. The couple was childless, and Hardy directed his emotions elsewhere. He had always had a broad sentimental streak in his personal life, falling in love with acquaintances and even passersby at the drop of a hat (or glance). As his fame grew, his opportunities to flirt with well-born beauties multiplied, though none of his passions, most of which were one-sided and frankly pathetic, was ever consummated.

As Tomalin notes, Emma was acute when she complained that Hardy cared less for real women than for the ones he invented. She just failed to realize that she would become his greatest invention of all. Her death unleashed a flood of tenderness, grief, and guilt, and revived Hardy's memory of their earliest days, even while it deepened his sense of the weight of the intervening time. He seems to have spent the year after her death in a kind of extended poetic trance, producing poem after poem in her memory, and about memory. In "The Phantom Horsewoman," speaking of himself in the third person, he evokes a vision of the young woman he had courted on the Cornish coast:

> A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
> He withers daily,
> Time touches her not,
> But she still rides gaily
> In his rapt thought
> On that shagged and shaly
> Atlantic spot,
> And as when first eyed
> Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

The lines, as Tomalin notes, cast a spell against time, and on their reader.

Hardy remained productive until the day he died; he was dictating poems on his deathbed. As the honors piled up, he retained an unpretentious manner and vivid interest in the things and people around him, traits attested to by the steady stream of visitors, famous and obscure, who made the pilgrimage to Max Gate. Rather gruesomely—if, in retrospect, aptly—his heart was buried in Dorset, the rest of his body in Poet's Corner. He was the first novelist buried at the Abbey since Dickens, the first poet since Tennyson. He had outlasted the prejudices that had impeded him from becoming a writer, and the prejudices that had tried to censor him once he had become one. It was a result he had foretold in his elegy on Swinburne:

> I still can hear the brabble and the roar
> At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
> That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
> Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
> Thine swells yet more and more. ■

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NEW YORK DIARIST

A Mighty Wind

Would American music have undergone a radical transformation in the middle of the last century, as it did, without Eric von Schmidt? No doubt and no matter. We all know how popular music changed during the first decades of the postwar era: It grew more informal, rougher and earthier, shifting from an aesthetic of burnished professionalism to one of unschooled authenticity. A flashpoint in this mutation was the folk boom of the late '50s and early '60s; a nidus of that phenomenon was the Cambridge coffeehouse scene, from which came the early folk idol Joan Baez, and the guiding spirit of the Harvard Square cafés was Eric von Schmidt. However American music might have evolved without him, the fact is that it changed in part because he was there.

Von Schmidt was a minor musician but a major influence on greaters who brought what they took from him into the culture beyond Cambridge. He died on February 2, at 75, after several years of declining health, and the terse encomia published immediately after his death betray the ephemerality of influence, the precious caprice of spiritus. (In *The New York Times*, von Schmidt's obituary ran below those for Whitney Balliett, the longtime jazz critic for *The New Yorker*; and Bob Carroll Jr., a writer for "I Love Lucy.") Von Schmidt is historic for leading others to make history. He was to the folk movement what Leonard Woolf was to Bloomsbury or what Alexandre Kojeve was to the post-Hegelians Sartre, Derrida, and Foucault.

Von Schmidt would have relished the latter notion—or debated it persuasively—because he knew his Hegel as well as his Howlin' Wolf. I got to know Von Schmidt fairly well in the early '90s, while I was researching my book about the folk era, *Positively 4th Street*, and I still remember noticing, in one of my early visits to his house, a small stack of library books on a drink-stained old desk. When I returned a week or so later, I found the pile replaced with new titles, all of history and philosophy, as I recall. We guzzled his drink of favor at the time, rum and orange juice, and once, as a toast, he blurted, "Fuck the structuralists!"

Von Schmidt's home-schooled wildman erudition made him ideally equipped to serve as dean of the coffeehouses in postwar Harvard Square. The Cambridge scene was pivotal in establishing folk music as a college craze in the '50s, because the presence of all those Ivy Leaguers imparted a scholarly patina upon what was supposed to be a music of the unschooled. At the time, there was a compelling tension in folk's conflicting qualities: It was at once anti-intellectual (made up by working people) and an object of scholarship (catalogued by academics and would-be academics like, respectively, John Lomax and his son Alan). Von Schmidt embodied this contradiction; indeed, he gloried in it.

The son of Harold von Schmidt, a prominent illustrator in the heyday of magazine art, Eric von Schmidt practiced both music and art since childhood. About ten years older than Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and their peers, von Schmidt was writing his own songs (in the idiom of his idol, Leadbelly) by 1951, when he was 19. He passed on college, did a stint in the Army, studied art abroad on a Fulbright, and settled in Cambridge in 1957, just as the coffeehouses were opening. He was the elder of the scene and impeccably credentialed. While most of the music's young fans knew the folk repertoire through field recordings made by the Lomaxes and released on 78-RPM records by the Library of Congress, von Schmidt had actually gone to the Library itself, studied volumes of the original recordings on the premises, and had came back North knowing how to play and sing little-known songs like "Wasn't That a Mighty Flood," "He Was a Friend of Mine," and "Ain't No Grave Can Hold Me Down." He was a pilgrim returned home from a holy site with sacred knowledge.

"My apartment became Action Central," von Schmidt recalled in *Baby, Let Me Follow You Down*, the dual memoir he wrote with the folksinger Jim Rooney, titled for von Schmidt's best-known song (an adaptation of an old blues, "Baby, Let Me Lay It on You"). Every folksinger or would-be folksinger in town came to see von Schmidt, and he passed on what he had learned in the Library of Congress. When Baez, a teenage daughter of an MIT physicist, decided to be a folksinger, she made a pilgrimage to the pilgrim, who taught her many of the first pieces she performed.

Bob Dylan, much the same, traveled to Cambridge and knocked on von Schmidt's door not long after he had moved east from Minnesota. Not yet 20, Dylan had not yet recorded his first album, and he was not yet writing much original material. Von Schmidt taught him "Baby Let Me Lay It on You," "He Was a Friend of Mine," "Acne," and half a dozen other tunes. "He had a sponge-like brain, and he wanted to know everything I knew," von Schmidt would later recall. "He didn't know a lot of country blues. He seemed very impressed by the fact that I was playing black music. I don't think he knew much about the black strain in folk music, but he was obviously very drawn to it." On his first album, Dylan acknowledged von Schmidt by name in a spoken introduction to what was now "Baby, Let Me Follow You Down," a song Dylan would continue to play in concert for decades. (In his set in the Band's final concert, staged by Martin Scorsese for the film *The Last Waltz*, Dylan sang the song twice, opening and closing with it.)

Caring to the brink of carelessness, von Schmidt devoted himself to other musicians at the expense of his own career. He recorded a small handful of albums but coached and prodded generations of musicians, from contemporaries of Baez and Dylan like Jim Kweskin and Geoff Muldaur to James Taylor (who still performs "Wasn't That a Mighty Flood" in concert, with a sweet little speech about von Schmidt). Every summer until a few years ago, he would host a lawn party at his house in Westport, Connecticut, and his acolytes would play for their mentor for hours. One year, I practiced a thorny von Schmidt original, "Joshua Gone Barbados," to sing and play for him. I brought my guitar but panicked and went home without daring a strum. The next morning, I got a fax from him. He wrote, "Keep practicing. I'll be here."

DAVID HAJDU

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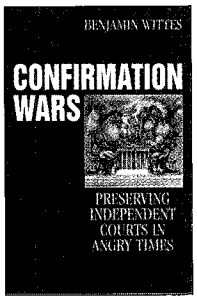

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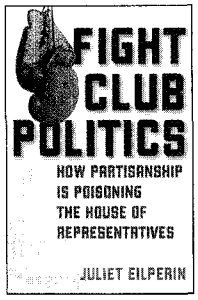

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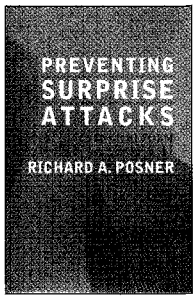

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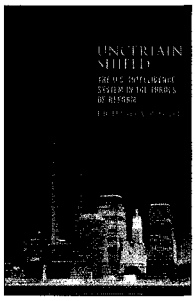

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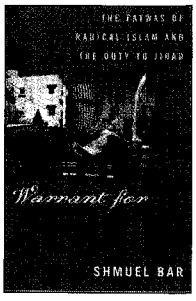

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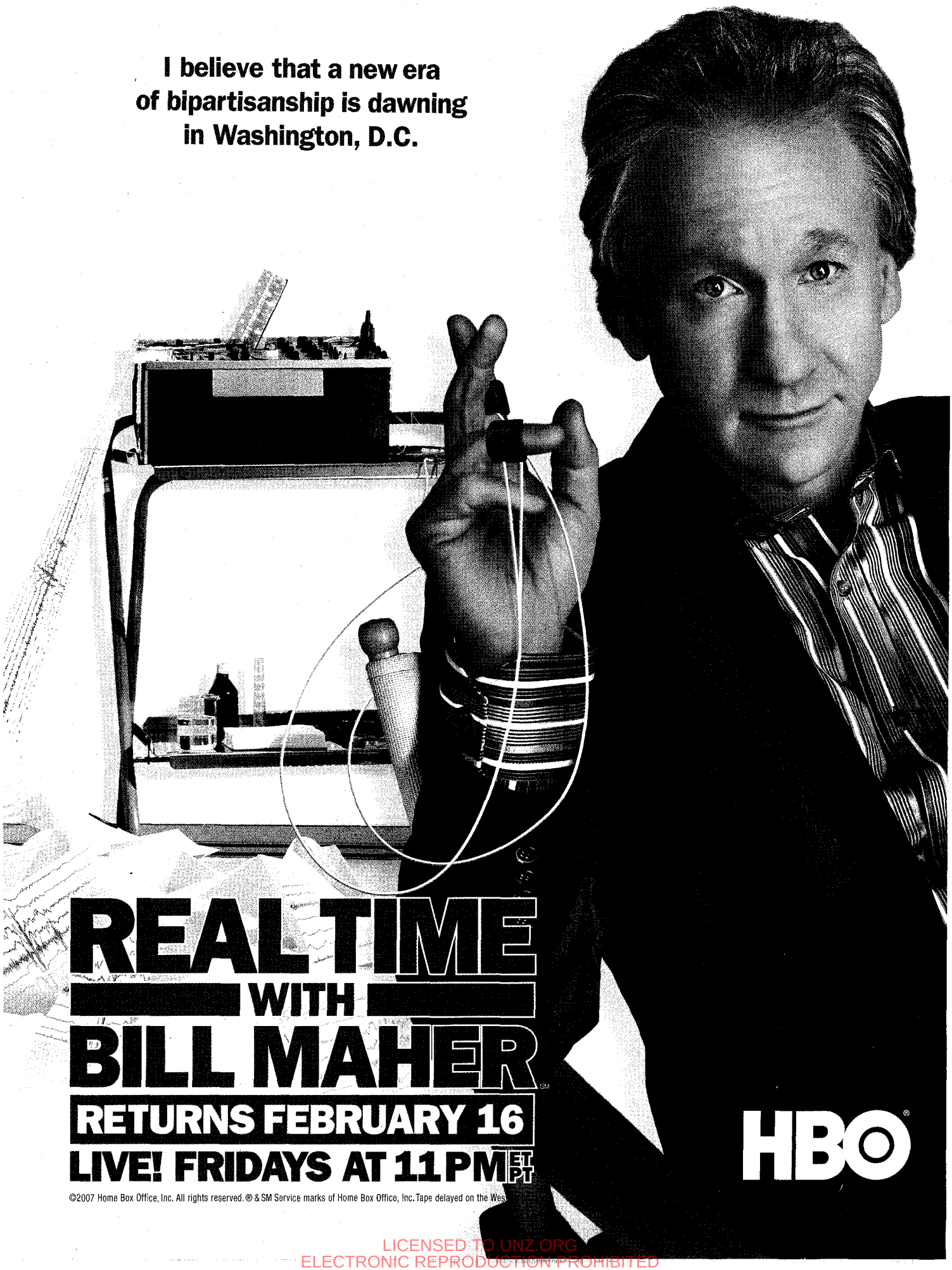
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